

## Still Standing After the Storm

*The weather has dominated the news lately: rainstorms in California, tornadoes in Florida, even an icestorm in New England. On July 28, 1997, it was flooding in Colorado. Here are three stories.*

### Rick Nees

It was a fairly typical Monday evening. Chanting daimoku in the car while looking for the house where people were meeting for gongyo. "If I could just remember Donna's address, this would be much easier," I scolded myself as I drove past the same set of houses for the third time.

It had begun to rain heavily just as I remembered how I found Donna's once before: driving around slowly until I heard the sweet sounds of harmonious chanting. Unfortunately, the heavy rain drowned out any other sounds. I decided to head back home.

At the fringe of Donna's neighborhood, the wheels of my van became submerged in a monstrous pool. I chanted daimoku all the way home with my face glued to the windshield. I parked in front of my home and stepped out of the van into a puddle that stretched 10 feet from the sidewalk.

About a half-hour later, the sun was back out. I left to pick up my son, Jack, from the other side of town. The clouds were still in control of the skies, treating viewers to beauty beyond words. My two daughters, Riki (then 9) and Nicole (then 17), stayed at their mom's while my son, Jack, and I took off for home.

The rains had started again. Jack and I conversed about the powers of nature and how, no matter how advanced humans may become, we will always be subservient toward nature. I told Jack that when I chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, I no longer feel subservient to nature. Instead, I feel like I am moving hand in hand, parallel with the forces of nature, and how with our forces joined, we gain great strength. It's similar to the way that any team benefits as a whole when its members work for a common goal, I said.

By the time we arrived home, we were stepping into a foot of water, and the rain was falling so hard it actually hurt. Jack screeched: "Dad! You won't believe my room! Come quick!"

The window wells in his room had become aquariums that leaked into the walls and floors of the room. There was a wave of water wandering across the floors.

The water continued to rise throughout our home. We hauled as many things as possible to the garage where it was dry. Jack's mother sent his two sisters to pick him up.

By the time they arrived, there was a river flashing across and down the road. Jack ran outside and jumped into the car. They drove about 30 feet before stalling out. To get out of the car, Nicole pulled little Riki through the door and began carrying her up-current toward the house. I was walking through the water toward them when Nicole suddenly lost her hold on Riki, who was too small to resist the rush of water. I was there just in time to grab Riki.

We got to the safety of the upstairs part of the house where another family lived. Once the kids were settled, I went back outside to see if the car could be saved. Although there was chaos in the air, I felt a sort of comforting feeling when I saw about six or seven people out on the street working together to rescue any automobile — and its occupants — that needed help. Instead of panicking, everyone outside was projecting an aura of satisfaction in helping others. We must have pushed five or six cars up to drier land. I almost felt lucky to be part of such an experience.

When I got back to the house, the kids had calmed down as much as could be expected. There we were: eight people in a two-bedroom duplex — three adults, five kids; some

Buddhists, a Hindu, and another I wasn't sure about. Although it did not seem appropriate for me to suggest chanting in the home of a Hindu, the comforts of Buddhism can be practiced in an infinite number of situations and ways. We talked about how lucky we were to have been involved in such a situation without injury to any of us, and how we all had a great new memory to log into our libraries of experiences.

The days that followed were loaded with great benefit to the social situation of our neighborhood and to the city of Fort Collins as a whole. I united and worked with many people whom I would never have otherwise. We will all share that experience for the rest of our lives.

I feel that if Buddhism wasn't a part of my life, I may have expressed a much darker picture of the whole flood experience. Changing poison into medicine is the greatest core concept that a person can carry inside and benefit from throughout life. This one great natural disaster medicated a large part of a city in ways that few may ever understand.

I love living Buddhism!

### **Tim Shaw**

Last year's flood dramatically changed my outlook both on Buddhism and my life. I was working in Cheyenne, Wyo., which is about an hour from where I live. It had just started raining as I drove back to Fort Collins. I didn't think anything of it, since it often rains in June and July.

When I finally arrived in Fort Collins, the right side of the street was filled with water, which was actually fun driving through (what a great splash!). When I pulled into my parking lot, I had to slow down because of the large amount of water that had collected at the entrance. This was unusual, but I wasn't worried. I was home and had many things to take care of, like walking my dog.

At 8:30 p.m., my mother called, and I was engaged in a long conversation with her about unresolved problems that I had finally found the courage to talk about with her.

Two hours into the conversation, I noticed my dog going into the kitchen a lot. That was unusual, so I checked on him (when he's quiet, he's usually getting into mischief). When I walked into the kitchen, there was muddy water coming through the wall. "Someone's bathtub must have overflowed" — that was my first thought.

Then I heard what sounded like a river outside. I looked out a window and saw that my car was submerged up to the hood. I yelled to my mother on the phone: "What should I do? We're having a flood!"

I called the police, who told me they were aware of the flooding, but that unless I was in immediate danger, there was nothing they could do. I put my dog in his carrier. Then I opened the front door — and there it was, water two-feet deep rushing past my door. I closed my door again.

An hour later, the water had subsided. A rescue crew arrived sometime after that and helped people who wanted to leave. There is something just not quite right about seeing a raft floating in your parking lot. My car was filled with water, but it started when I tried the key. I moved it to higher ground before it stalled.

Later we heard that some people had died in the flood. I couldn't believe it — this isn't supposed to happen in Fort Collins. Not where I live! My next immediate concern was my insurance and what would be covered. I guess I was more worried about my own well-being and how the flood affected me rather than its devastating effect on the city.

A couple days later, some friends from my SGI-USA district came by to see if they could help. I was feeling sorry for myself and very angry at the whole situation, so I vented on them. They actually supported me and wanted to help. They organized a group of

wonderful people to come over and help me clean up the mess. I was still feeling down and overwhelmed with the whole thing, and I began to wonder if this had happened to me because I was now practicing Buddhism.

I went the next day to my former church and spoke to the director. I began to talk about what had happened and asked about his view of Buddhism. He couldn't tell me a lot since he didn't know the practice. Instead, he told me the Christian view of life. As I began to tell him my beliefs, I gradually realized I was talking about Buddhism. I left with more faith in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

I began to chant with more interest and belief in the Gohonzon and invited district members over to chant with me. I gained a newfound faith in the practice.

And now, I can look at any situation, no matter how bad it may seem at first, and know that I can learn something from it — that I will survive and even thrive. And that I can reach out and help others.

## **Donna Schmid**

The rain started coming down in buckets by 8:00 p.m. My fiancée, Richard, and I left for work around 10:00 p.m. Our shift on the cleaning crew at Colorado State University starts at 10:30. We tried to drive out of the neighborhood, but a policewoman standing knee-deep in water told us to turn back. We went home and called work to say we'd come in when the water in the streets drained off a bit.

About an hour later, Richard and I embarked on an unforgettable adventure.

Our usual route was blocked off, so I tried alternatives, but wherever I drove, I encountered a raging river. As I maneuvered through the water, I chanted daimoku furiously, creating a rhythm of protection that counteracted the waves. Even though my car rides low, it never once stalled. I saw many four-wheel-drive trucks stalled and floating down the streets. I never once doubted the protection of the Gohonzon. I knew Richard and I would be safe.

When we arrived at CSU, I had to park on higher ground since my usual parking space was under water. Richard and I waded through waist-deep water and finally arrived at work. The power was out all over the campus, but we quickly found our work crew. Someone told us that the rushing water had broken through a wall in the basement of the recently renovated library building.

Richard and I had the same thought: We would have been in the basement of the library when the wall broke had the policewoman not stopped our first attempt to get to work.

In my mind I kept thanking the Buddhist deities for the protection that surrounded me, Richard and our co-workers.

During and after the experience, I found encouragement and comfort in these words of Nichiren Daishonin:

Although I and my disciples may encounter various difficulties, if we do not harbor doubts in our hearts, we will as a matter of course attain Buddhahood. Do not have doubts simply because heaven does not lend you protection. Do not be discouraged because you do not enjoy an easy and secure existence in this life. This is what I have taught my disciples morning and evening, and yet they begin to harbor doubts and abandon their faith. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p.180)

The flood was a crucial event for me. The reports on the radio at work the next day were more and more devastating — a train derailment, gas explosions, many people homeless. Almost every building on the CSU campus sustained extensive damage.

What incredible protection Richard and I had.

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