

PERSPECTIVE: The Simple Answer Is the Hardest

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I've wanted to be a writer since I was 7 years old, when I wrote my first short story. I attempted my first novel at 12, but don't get too excited, it was only 12 pages long. I tried two more times, and by age 23, was up to about 23 pages. One page for each year I managed to stay alive. It's hard to say which was more difficult.

I found a study recently about creative writers, which gives them certain core personality attributes, among them: independence, nonconformity, risk-taking, introversion, intensity and a strong tendency to suffer from depression. Another study took that a step further, saying that writers tend to be schizoid, hysterical and psychopathic — in other words, “markedly deviant” from the general population. Anyone who knows me well knows this to be accurate enough.

I was seriously suicidal by 26 (after reading biographies of Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath, who wouldn't be?). I can never forget that my fortune lies in having found the greatest writer and mentor in the world. So, I was deeply moved when I read an essay by SGI President Ikeda Feb. 20 *World Tribune* on “The Art of Writing”: “[P]eople often ask me how I have mastered the art of writing.... I have never engaged in any special study...to develop my writing skills...nor do I feel my writing is particularly good.... I am always embarrassed to read what I have written.... I can't begin to measure my chagrin.”

His great humility in the face of how powerful, how very important — in fact, nothing short of life saving — his writing has been to me, is overwhelming. On the other hand, I said to myself, if he also sincerely feels that way, maybe I should keep trying.

I went recently to the publications conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center. I went because I was chanting about my writing, and how I could, once and for all, believe in myself as a writer. One thing I had to face up to was my fear.

On the way to the FNCC, I had a powerful realization: The only thing stopping me from being respected as a writer and fully developing my potential as a writer is — you've guessed it — ME! While in Florida, I chanted to break through what's keeping me from fulfilling my greatest desire. Even my mother, who's never supported me in this (in my family, you were only honored if you wanted to be an actor when you grew up) snuck into my office while I was gone, read some of my writing, and declared when I returned (as only a mother can): “You're a great writer! This is what you SHOULD BE DOING!”

Sheesh. If only I'd known.

General Director Zaitzu's Gosho lecture at the FNCC on “On Attaining Buddhahood” made the point that, as people who write for our organizational publications, we serve as a bridge between our organization and our society, a very important bridge. It requires a high life-condition to ensure that our bridge is solid and safe for transporting our message to the world. As President Ikeda said in his essay on writing: “Writing is not some intellectual pastime. It is a spiritual struggle amid harsh reality.” His struggle to find the most appropriate word with which to encourage and inspire and provide nourishment for members, for friends of the SGI, and for all the as-yet-unborn-future SGI members and friends of the SGI is awe inspiring. I've found a renewed sense of appreciation for that struggle.

In another essay on writing, President Ikeda says: “While I am writing,...I sometimes walk around in my room to refresh myself. At times, I see Gakkai members out my window who are visiting the headquarters building or the community center. Each time I see them, I am driven by the thought that I must not stop writing even for a day. Then, I

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gather up my thoughts and start writing again.”

OK, so if I’m going to be a great writer, not for myself alone, but for the sake of my country, I need to keep writing. Sounds simple, doesn’t it? But I really have to tell myself that every day.

At least, now, I am.

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