

VANESSA KOSSI, HOUSTON
Voices Do the Buddha's Work

Vanessa Kossi used to be an introvert — until she joined the Sunset Chorus. Now, she and other chorus members travel throughout their community, singing, spreading joy and creating warm bonds of friendship.

When I was growing up, my mother was a member of a small church singing group. I used to go to rehearsals with her and enjoyed their singing. Since my mother's death, my involvement with the SGI-USA Sunset Chorus in Houston has given me a deep sense of satisfaction knowing that I'm doing something my mother and I both loved.

I have been a member of the chorus for about 15 years and have been practicing Buddhism for about 20. I enjoy being part of the chorus and have developed many lasting friendships. Singing is a way for me to contribute to kosen-rufu by touching peoples' lives.

I am a wife and the mother of two sons, ages 20 and 9. My family keeps me very busy. Trying to keep up with my family life, as well as attend Texas Southern University in pursuit of my master's degree, has given me the opportunity to chant more and to participate in chorus activities. I also volunteer at a children's shelter from time to time.

When I find myself becoming overwhelmed, I return to the Gohonzon and pray to realize all of my goals. Most importantly, I want to focus on developing my career as a social worker.

I am somewhat of an introvert, or at least I used to be. Singing in the chorus has opened up my life. Before participating in the chorus, I always kept to myself and did not want to interact with people. I now realize that we need interaction with one another so that we can truly grow. Interaction is a good thing, and conflict can be resolved when we dialogue openly and sincerely. This was something I had to learn.

I am from a family of six children, but I have felt like an only child because of the gaps in our ages. As the oldest daughter, I was always the one who was taking care of and cleaning up after everyone. I was always called mean because I didn't smile much and was considered to be too serious. This was my way of protecting my feelings. I didn't want too many interaction with others for fear that it would create problems.

Participating in the chorus has given me the opportunity to come out of my shell. I have developed courage and trust in the Gohonzon and myself. I have developed enough faith that I was able to leave my job of 15 years to return to college and pursue my career as a social worker.

Late last year the chorus members decided we needed to share this Buddhism with the community. What better way to do it than to go out into the community and sing for people. In December we visited the Shriner's Hospital Burn Unit in Galveston. It was a very eye-opening experience. As we walked through the different areas singing, it made a lasting impression on all of us. Our problems seemed minor in comparison to what these patients had to endure.

In February we visited the Silver Threads nursing home, and in April we sang at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center's Children's Ward. This June we visited Windsor Place Health Care Center, and in July we performed at Shriner's Hospital Burn Unit in Galveston.

After each performance, we stay and talk with as many people as possible. We have met some very interesting people. One lady at the Silver Thread's Nursing Home was 101 years old. Essie Brooks, enjoying her birthday, commented by saying, "I really hope you can

come more often. I loved every moment of it.”

We never fail to leave people with smiles on their faces. Jaunita Brown, 86 years young, said, “I loved the singing and I really enjoyed my morning. I loved every bit of it.” The patients sing, rock back and forth, and clap their hands.

Participating in the chorus has been a very growing and satisfying experience for me. It has given me the courage to do things that I used to just dream about. I have developed new friendships within the organization, and in the community as well. We are always asked back to the places we visit, and we all leave smiling. I’m determined to continue spreading peace and hope for the future. As Nichiren Daishonin states, “The voice does the Buddha’s work.”

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Title: Voices Do the Buddha’s Work
Subject: World Tribune 09/25/98 n.3210 p.1 WT980925p01 Houston, Texas
Author: Vanessa Kossi
Keywords: Buddha Experiences Houston Practice Propagation Texas Voices Work