

LORRAINE FERRANTE, PALISADES PARK, N.J.
An Artist in Life

Twenty-two years ago, when Lorraine Ferrante was 21, she was recovering from her second stay in a psychiatric hospital — as a result of a suicide attempt. That’s when she was introduced to Buddhism. ‘Through the limitless power of this practice, I have forged my freedom and identity,’ she says. ‘I have deeply changed my karma over the past 22 years.’

I grew up in a very dysfunctional family with a history of alcoholism, emotional abuse and instability. As a child, the atmosphere in my home was always one of extreme tension. My parents fought constantly. They seemed to hate each other. There was never any emotional support or nurturing in my environment. Being the youngest child, I was sensitive and withdrew into myself. I was extremely shy and would play alone for hours, imagining myself a famous actress.

Needless to say, by the time I reached my teens, I had deep feelings of inadequacy, insecurity and worthlessness. I had no sense of identity and was full of anger and depression.

My lowest point came at the age of 18 when I was found unconscious in the street from an overdose of barbiturates. By the time I was 21, I was recovering from my second stay in a psychiatric hospital as a result of a suicide attempt.

I was a high school drop-out collecting unemployment when my sister Eileen introduced me to the practice of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. She was just beginning herself, but I believed her when she said: “I don’t really know much about it yet, except that it makes me feel better. Why don’t you try it?” So I did.

I began chanting one evening when I was desperate and depressed because I didn’t have a date and couldn’t find any drugs. My life was full of restlessness and pain that compelled me consistently toward self-destructive behavior. But that night, when I chanted, it soothed and calmed me. It was like a balm. I was able to relax and go to sleep. This seemingly simple incident was to me the actual proof I needed to continue chanting regularly. My sister and I received the Gohonzon at the same time.

For the first time in my life, I felt the joy and power of hope well up inside of me. I began to prefer a drug-free reality right away, and stopped the drugs completely within a few months. The early years of my practice were about building my confidence and forging my identity. I chanted to go to college, which to me seemed impossible. I had to confront my fear and insecurity over and over again in front of the Gohonzon in order to follow through with all of the steps necessary to enter college. After chanting much daimoku, I received my high school equivalency diploma and was accepted into college with full financial assistance.

Once in college, I chanted to know what I wanted to do with my life and re-discovered my childhood dream of being an actress. I majored in drama and upon graduation was nominated to represent my school in a nationwide audition for scholarships to the top theater training centers in the country. I was accepted into one with a scholarship and teaching assistantship.

The training program was extremely rigorous, and I frequently felt overwhelmed. I was commuting, teaching, studying and rehearsing almost every waking minute. I kept challenging myself not to give up and I chanted every spare moment. All of my tremendous efforts paid off when I received my master of fine arts degree in 1986. I have had many

opportunities to act as a paid professional in a variety of great roles. I had made my childhood fantasy a reality!

By this time I had been practicing about 10 years. I was no longer the shy, insecure, self-destructive person I used to be. I was a strong, confident, bright and accomplished woman. Although my life had grown in leaps and bounds and my career was fulfilling, there was still a deep emptiness inside of me. What I wanted most in all the world was to be married and have a family.

I did not have a great track record in relationships with men. Though I must say that over the years, as my human revolution progressed, I went from bad relationships with the wrong men, to good relationships with men who just weren't right for me, to no relationships at all!

Through all the years of my practice, I had consistently chanted to meet the right man for my life and to have a family. At the age of 35 I found myself suffering from a profound loneliness and depression, accompanied by the booming tick of my biological clock. Each evening when I sat in front of the Gohonzon I could not stop the tears. I had changed so much, but still somewhere deep inside of me lived the little girl who thought she was worthless and unlovable.

Through daimoku and guidance I came to understand that I needed to take responsibility for my life-condition. I could be happy no matter what I did or whom I did or didn't have in my life, and at the same time I could chant with fierce determination to fulfill my dream. I envisioned my life with my husband and family in concrete and specific detail and began to chant with true confidence and joy that my vision would someday be a reality. My life-condition became lighter and brighter. Instead of focusing on my loneliness, I concentrated on my members and my practice. Very soon, I met a very special man and one year later we were married!

He is everything I chanted for — a warm, kind, sincere, honest and loving man who also wanted a family. He was 44 at the time we married, and I was 36. We decided we didn't want to waste any time and started to plan for our family right away. When I failed to become pregnant, we decided to go for fertility testing and the results were not positive. Basically, we were told that we were an infertile couple and the chances of our becoming pregnant were very slim.

After the initial shock wore off, I lost no time in getting in front of the Gohonzon. This time I did not wallow in pain and tears but went straight to the fierce determination part. I told the Gohonzon that we would definitely have a baby, no matter what! I didn't know how or when, but I had complete faith that it would happen. I felt the deepest sense of freedom and power in my life when I made this determination. There was no pain. Then I told my husband, who doesn't practice and was quite depressed, the same thing. "We will have a baby. I have the Gohonzon and with Gohonzon, nothing is impossible. You'll see."

One month later I found out I was pregnant. Today, I am the proud, often harried mother of two beautiful healthy boys, and we're expecting our third child in March. My family life is rich, and my sons could not have a more devoted and doting father.

I have deeply changed my karma over the past 22 years. The legacy of dysfunction has ended for my family. I really feel the truth of the teaching that through practice we change our karma seven generations back and forward. My two sisters and I are in strong, secure marriages, and my two brothers, who battled addiction for many years, have now been in recovery and sobriety for more than six years. Through the limitless power of this practice, I have forged my freedom and identity. My family and I have changed our destiny.

Today I have new challenges. In addition to raising a very active 3-year-old and 5-year-old, I care for my aging father — my mother recently passed away — and I work toward

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fulfilling a new dream with a career in education. In theater school we were taught that the most important thing was to enjoy the process. Performances are short-lived, so enjoying the process is of primary importance. That reminds me a lot of living as a Buddhist.

Life will always have ups and downs, but if I can enjoy my daily practice and if I keep going back to the Gohonzon time and again with my fears, my tears, my hopes and my dreams, I will create a life of the richest value. I will be an artist in life leaving a legacy of challenges and dreams fulfilled.

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