

**Mr. Nieves Builds His Dream House**  
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*Over the past 30 years, Luis Nieves has gone from being a disturbed youth to a successful entrepreneur. He and his family eventually built the house that they had dreamed about when they were poor. 'I can now report that all prayers are answered, all sins forgiven, all righteousness proven. And SGI President Ikeda's guidance is unfailingly true.'*

My father was killed in an auto accident when I was 12. I joked and played with him before going to bed one night, and the next day, while walking home from school, I saw him pictured face down in the street on the front page of our local paper. Gone.

Our lives changed instantly and forever. My mother had to go to work immediately to support three kids. We lost our home and had to move far away, closer to family, in order for her to make more money. From upwardly mobile and prosperous to poor and constrained almost overnight, we were uprooted, just like that.

We crashed into the reality of the transience of life, and I was scared. I began to view my immediate family and relatives in a new way. None of my relatives — and I had many — were satisfied in their lives or happy. Money and education made no difference, because our family covered the spectrum on both counts. If no one I knew of was happier as they aged, then why live? To grow old, get sick, and die? There had to be some answer to my problem.

Perhaps if a man had come into my life at this time who kept his word, whose actions were consistent with his words, who genuinely cared about me, I might not have remained lost in life as long as I did. Such a person was not to come into my life for years after my father's death.

Today I actually chant with wholehearted gratitude for having been such a disturbed youth. I have deep appreciation for my dear father's life and his most difficult yet successful mission to have prepared me for a happy and challenging life, together with my mentor, SGI President Ikeda.

In August, 30 years ago, having just hitchhiked to San Francisco from Long Island, I was invited to a Buddhist meeting. I was passing through on my way north to Napa. I thought, "There might be some eligible girls there, some incense, who knows?" I was prepared to trivialize the poor, the sick, the ignorant and the lost, misled zealots I knew that I would have to meet and tolerate for an hour or so. My arrogance, my slander of life, was astounding.

But I received the Gohonzon immediately. The man who had invited me, who also led the meeting, had some striking quality. It was not what he said; I've forgotten that. It was that he was fighting to achieve something greater than himself. He had some great and different way of seeing life.

And he acted as though he really knew me, knew me well and genuinely liked and cared about me, which I still believe that he did. I had the distinct impression that I was an important part of what he was fighting for in his life. He was to be the first of many men to show me the way to myself.

I experienced benefits immediately from my practice. I hitchhiked the 50 miles to San Francisco every weekend to attend meetings. My faith sponsor then told me that to really get great benefits, I must bring others to the meetings and read President Ikeda's guidance, which I began to do. Initially, that was the easy part. His guidance and the theories of

Buddhism, along with my actual proof, struck a resounding chord of refreshing truth within me. I could not help but tell almost everyone I met of the wonder of this religion.

Ten years later, I fell in love with a young woman, Linda, whom I met at a Buddhist meeting, and we got married. Our first child was born with the most serious congenital problems. Her lower legs and feet were horribly deformed. Her birth coincided with my being fired from my job, which itself signaled the beginning of a journey through years of dark wilderness. It was also the end of a long period of growing arrogance in faith, which itself grew in proportion to the amount of money I made. And I was making a lot of money — before it ran out.

Linda and I knew that our karma was the cause of Margaret's deformity. We knew this in spite of the fact that Linda's prescribed medication was the medically suspected cause. The doctors pronounced that her troubles were not limited to her legs; she would be retarded and dwarfish at best. And I had no money to pay for operations nor did we have insurance.

Linda and I began a strong campaign to chant and share this Buddhism with others, all the while studying President Ikeda's guidance and the Daishonin's writings. We took Margaret everywhere with us. As she grew, we taught her gongyo. We also encouraged her to help invite potential guests to meetings.

As the years passed, through a series of serendipitous events, Margaret's physical problems were cured. She grew into a fine student and sincere young woman of big heart and strong character. Today, she attends a small, exclusive private college and is on her way to discovering her mission in life for kosen-rufu.

I must share with you that the greatest compliment I've received in my life came from my daughter. Upon returning very passionate from a student division conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center, she was studying one of President Ikeda's dialogues; we were driving along in my car. She told me she loves to read his guidance because he somehow reminded her of me. She said that she felt the way he spoke sounded to her a lot like me. I tried to reply in a lighthearted way, but I must admit it was a moving experience.

Our son, Eugene Takashi, came eight years after Margaret. At 10 years old, his life is quite unlike mine was growing up. Eugene attends a small, exclusive private school, which he loves. His teacher is an educator whose educational philosophy parallels that of Tsunesburo Makiguchi.

My son was born as I began my quest in a concrete way — a quest to keep the vows made to the Gohonzon during my youth and throughout the years of suffering poverty; vows made to prove to society with my life the greatness of the Gohonzon.

The first thing my wife and I did after marrying was to commission the building of a unique, beautiful altar for kosen-rufu. Poor as we were, we somehow got the money together to have it built of the finest woods and beautifully crafted. We knew that if we ever wanted to actualize our dream of building a grand home for kosen-rufu, we should start with a grand altar to put the Gohonzon in.

We held fast to our dream, through every storm, through thick and through very thin.

Today, we live in that home! And that altar is its centerpiece. We had the best architect, the finest contractors and even a famous colorist design and build the house in the Queen Anne style, authentic in every detail. We enhanced its beauty with world-class landscaping. This home, with its prestigious address in beautiful Napa Valley, is adorned with fountains from Florence, a room from England, custom-period lighting from the White House's and the Smithsonian's craftspeople. There are original paintings, an observatory and marble from the quarry Michelangelo used. This place of beauty would need its own brochure for a complete description.

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I'm also pleased to tell you that the seven-figure cost for this project did not faze or strain me in the least.

As for the financial fortune necessary to make this dream come true, I will tell you this: At the end of the wilderness period referred to earlier, I was looking for a concrete business opportunity to actualize my vows of appreciation and gratitude. At the moment that I deeply understood what the Daishonin meant when he said that should the gods forsake him, should all persecutions assail him, he would never forsake the Lotus Sutra, my phone rang from thousands of miles away. Someone who proved to be a great mentor of strong, pure character in the insurance business, at a multi-billion dollar international company, hired me.

I began what was to be five years of training under this man's tutelage, learning the intricacies of a little-known yet often used aspect of the industry. I took this opportunity quite joyfully, determined to prove the power of faith. President Ikeda, after all, tells us that an untrained man is a loser in life. Through strong prayer and overcoming many obstacles, I succeeded brilliantly in actualizing what were, if you will, this man's teachings.

With that success, and many other related experiences, I began my own small company 10 years ago. Today, I am president of two very small insurance companies and on the board of a third. Small, in insurance company terms, is defined as having less than \$500,000,000 in assets.

Our core administration company home office has the most cheerful, hard-working and dedicated employees imaginable. They are well paid, enjoy two company-paid retirement programs, company-paid health care for them and their families and many other benefits. We do business nationally. We are often told, by visiting executives and clients, that we have an unusually good reputation within our industry. I'm honored to report that industry colleagues and other business visitors from around the country often ask me about Buddhism, having heard that I practice.

So, that's about it. OK, Luis, you say, you've got the eight-figure net worth, seven-figure income and drive the black Mercedes instead of hitchhiking. Well, I say, don't miss the point of my story.

This past August, I celebrated my 30th year of doing gongyo and practicing this Buddhism, never having quit. When we were new in faith, my young friends and I often wondered what life would be like after 30 years of practice. Would our dreams have come true by then? All we were certain of was the necessity of sharing this Buddhism as much as we could, participating in every activity and studying. In our hearts, we trusted that in this way, we would accumulate enough power to create the kind of indestructibly happy lives we yearned for, and which the Daishonin and President Ikeda promised us, both for ourselves and for the rest of society.

I can now report that the promises are true: All prayers are answered, all sins forgiven, all righteousness proven. And President Ikeda's guidance is unfailingly true.

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