

## THE ART OF CONSTRUCTION BY MICHAEL GOODMAN, NEW YORK

THE famous San Diego Chicken was one of my first subjects as a photographer. The biggest radio station in San Diego had hired me to photograph the mascot sliding into the feet of baseball Hall of Famer Lou Brock at Jack Murphy Stadium. It was 1977 and the St. Louis Cardinal outfielder had just broken the world record for stolen bases in a career.

I was a nervous wreck and unfamiliar with how the flash on my camera worked. With just minutes before the Cardinals were to play the Padres, I shot a whole roll of film with the Chicken and Brock in various poses. I turned the film over to the station rep and left for my next job in New York. It was the next day that I realized I had used the wrong setting on my camera for the Lou Brock job. The film would be blank and I felt awful. I had only been practicing Buddhism in the SGI for three months at the time. I thought that was the end of my short career as a professional photographer. I sank into a black hole of self-doubt. Before I began chanting, I believed a photographer had to be tall, handsome and cool like James Bond (which I wasn't), and have lots of camera gear and money (which I didn't).

I told myself I would never make it as a photographer because I wasn't good enough, that I didn't have the training and that there was too much competition. The person who introduced me to Buddhism said, Why don't you put all your worries aside and chant for your dream to be a photographer?

Very upset and discouraged over the San Diego assignment, I remember calling a young man who had great experiences practicing this Buddhism. His genuine concern and faith in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism inspired me. Now I look back to that day as the true beginning of my career, and I'll never forget the warmth he showed me.

President Ikeda said, "I have a mission, mine alone. You too have a mission only you can fulfill." These words, and the encouragement of my fellow SGI-USA members, made me more determined than ever to be a great photographer. I made this resolution as I chanted. It was in the SGI that an opportunity presented itself. I began volunteering as a photographer for SGI events in San Diego and Los Angeles for the organization's newspaper, *World Tribune*. This allowed me to receive training from the paper's chief photographer, Gregory Nakasugi, and as I found out later, it was also a source of good fortune.

I learned that by chanting and taking action I could overcome obstacles and turn them into benefits—that what appears as loss can actually be a great opportunity. I sensed a dynamic rhythm in my life, fully supported by my environment. This was very exciting to me and something I had never understood nor experienced before I began practicing Buddhism. As my faith grew, so did my desire to be a great photographer. One of my dreams was for people to pay me to travel on photographic assignments.

Today, I specialize in construction photography. I have been on assignment in thirteen countries including Spain, Italy, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Indonesia, India, Japan and China. To date, my construction photos have appeared on sixty-three covers of major construction magazines. In the writings of Nichiren Daishonin it states, "A blue fly, if it clings to the tail of a thoroughbred horse, can travel ten thousand miles" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2, p. 25). I feel like the SGI has been just such a 'thoroughbred horse'. I am so grateful to be practicing with the SGI and chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

## A Blend of Art and Construction

IGREW up in a family of civil engineers and art lovers in New York. My father, uncles and cousin were part of the family tunneling business, which was started by my grandfather in the 1940's. When I was 12, my mother began a thirty-year career as an art dealer, opening galleries in New York and Paris. The combined influence of both engineering and art has played a meaningful role in shaping my career and interests in life.

After deciding in college that I didn't want to become a biologist, I transferred to the art program at the University of California at San Diego in 1976. It was there that I studied art history, filmmaking and photography. In reality, I am mostly self-taught.

For the first five years, I shot sports and rock groups at the San Diego Sports Arena and dabbled a little in fashion photography. It was when I moved back to New York City that I became fascinated by construction photography. One of my first assignments was in a tunnel seven hundred feet below the earth. It was dark, wet, noisy, and loaded with tons of heavy equipment and big burly men. All larger than life, it was as if I were watching superb athletes. And photography was a way for me to capture it all. Having gained experience as a fashion photographer, I was able to use my eye for beauty and glamour in the world of construction.

In 1993 the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York caught the attention of the world's media. I became interested in the reconstruction effort, which went largely unnoticed by the press after the first week. One of my photos of the bomb site was published as a two-page spread in *Life* magazine. In 1995, after the Kobe earthquake, I traveled to Japan for the same reason. Again after a week's time, the story of devastation was over in the media, but to me the more positive and inspiring story of reconstruction had begun. The photos I took were in several magazines, including *Business Week*.

Art and construction, the careers of my parents, have provided me with two different views of the world. I've been able to draw from each of them and at the same time, follow my own dream. This is fortune from my Buddhist practice. The engineer's world is one of logic, requiring creative solutions for difficult problems. The artist's viewpoint of the world is not necessarily logical, rather it involves interpretations based on free expression of individual style. In construction photography, I found a way to connect both worlds. □

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