

## **EXPERIENCE — LISA MAXWELL, MAR VISTA, CALIF. I'M NOT TURNING BACK NOW!**

I am 36 years old, and experienced years of despair and depression as a slave to alcohol and drugs. I tried to quit many times, but always turned back to chemicals when reality became too hard to face. I crashed cars, stole from my own family, and put myself in many compromising situations to get what I needed. Finally, two years ago I became so desperate that I wanted to die. I had studied music for most of my life and had an impressive career behind me as a saxophone player, but I hadn't played in months. I couldn't get out of bed. I felt like a shell of a human being.

With the help and compassion of others who had been through the same thing, and a modicum of faith, I made it through to the other side. I was free of chemicals, but I still felt a giant void in my gut. I knew that nothing on the outside would fix me; that true happiness is an inside job. I had no idea where to turn to find this faith I knew I needed to live a fulfilling and useful life.

A friend who had helped me get over my drug problem used to quote from the writings of Nichiren Daishonin and SGI President Daisaku Ikeda. Everything she said made perfect sense to me and I wanted the peace of mind and wisdom she had. I asked her to take me to one of her meetings and on Jan. 1, 1998, I cried through my first Buddhist meeting in the Sherman Oaks District. I felt like I was home, like I had been chanting all my life.

Within a week I was doing a complete gongyo. I bought several books and studied about Nichiren Dai-shonin's Buddhism. I was so ready for this practice! I once heard someone say, "It's not that the gates of heaven will open up and you will live in heaven on earth, but that the gates of hell will open up and let you out." This is exactly how I felt, and so began my own human revolution.

Two months after I started chanting, my apartment was broken into and all of my saxophones and jewelry were stolen. Nothing was insured and I suffered a loss of over \$13,000 as well as the sentimental value, which was worth more than money. I felt violated, and couldn't understand why this had happened to me. My Buddhist friends said, "Congratulations! You have many obstacles!" I did not see why this was a reason to rejoice, but continued chanting with all my heart. One month later, I received a settlement from a prior lawsuit that had been ensuing for five years. The money I received was just enough to pay the lawyers and buy new saxophones.

In the meantime, I called every musician I knew to tell them to keep an eye out for my stolen instruments. One of the people I called was an old friend named Julie whom I hadn't spoken to in many months. She and her husband, Steve, were happy to hear from me and invited me over to see them. They had been composing the music for Warner Brothers cartoons and put me to work reorganizing their home offices.

At our district meeting, I was told to be specific while chanting in front of the Gohonzon. I chanted for lots of high-paying work as a musician that did not involve much driving. Four days later, Steve asked me if I wanted to start orchestrating for him on the cartoons for "lots of money." He would fax me his musical sketches and I could work from my home. Of course I accepted.

I love my work and am making more money than I have ever made before. It turned out that on the other side of what I thought was the worst thing in the world was an enormous benefit.

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Marcel Proust wrote, “To goodness and wisdom we make only promises; pain we obey.” It is certainly true for me. It took deep pain and desperation for me to be willing to try anything for relief. It was with this willing attitude that I found Buddhism. Nam-myoho-rence-kyo blasted its light through the darkness I once felt and has illuminated my life with immense faith.

On Sept. 4, 1998, I received the Gohonzon and it was one of the most exciting moments of my life. The other night I was chanting and suddenly realized that I am a part of something huge — this Buddhism! President Ikeda’s lifelong efforts toward kosen-rufu have touched me profoundly, and I wish to thank him. The joy and inner peace that I found as a result of practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism have changed my life in a way that I did not know was possible. If I can help even one person with what I have gone through, it has all been worth it.

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