

'I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT!' EXPERIENCE BY DESHAWN WILSON, BALTIMORE

My name is DeShawn Wilson, and I have been practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism for 11 years. I already knew that the SGI was an amazing organization, however, my trip to LA enlightened me to a higher degree as to how great and fortunate we are to be practicing this Buddhism.

About a year ago, I had made a determination to attend one of the conferences held at the Florida Nature Culture Center. I had heard people giving experiences about how encouraging the conferences were and I wanted to find out for myself why these conferences were so encouraging. Due to the movement in Los Angeles, all of the conferences for the summer were cancelled and activities were geared toward Los Angeles. I thought to myself that it would be nice to get chosen to attend the culture festival in Los Angeles; however, I did not think too much about it. Life went on and I continued to do my regular activities. When asked if I would be interested in attending I said sure, but I didn't really think that I would be chosen to represent Baltimore. When I was told that I was chosen to go, I was so surprised. I couldn't believe that I was chosen. As the days drew closer to Sept. 23, I still could not believe that I was going to California. As I was at Dulles International Airport checking my baggage, I still could not believe that I was going to California. As the plane was taking off the runway, I still could not believe I was going to California. As I was landing at the airport in Los Angeles, I couldn't believe I was IN California.

First thing coming off the plane, we were welcomed by screaming Los Angeles members. And what I didn't know then was that the screaming Los Angeles members were everywhere. When we arrived at the hotel, there were more members screaming. We went to the Los Angeles Friendship Center, there were more members screaming. When we went to the Pasadena Convention Center to see the culture festival performance, there were more members screaming to welcome us. It was such a warm feeling. I have never felt so important. Everywhere we went, people were looking at us like Who are they? Where did they come from? I even had a chance to talk to people about the SGI. Because we were wearing ID tags, and many people saw these people walking around with different color tags around their necks, a lot of people were curious as to what group we belonged. Of course this was a chance for me to practice up on my propagation skills, and I did so.

The entire four days were encouraging and I felt like I was in SGI utopia. The performance was amazing and it was a real eye opener for me. I cried through the first 20 minutes of the performance because the performances were really touching. I know the guys don't want to mention it but they were crying, too. No words can explain it. All I can say is wait for the video. It helped me to realize that one person CAN make a difference by standing up for what one believes in. Look at Martin Luther King. He was one man and look what impact he made to society. Look at Rosa Parks. She was one woman and look what impact she made to society. Mandela, Malcolm X, Thomas Jefferson, Linus Pauling, 2Pac Shakur, all have made some type of impact on society and I don't think that any of them had the Gohonzon. We have the Gohonzon, so think about how much more of an impact we can have on society. One person can make a difference. WE can make a difference.

President Ikeda says that he wants the youth of the SGI-USA to lead the 21st century. I know that we have the capability to do so. Why do you think everyone wants to come into

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the United States and capture the American Dream? I believe we are already leading the 21st Century. Listening to people's experiences and what people have overcome, I know that we are capable young people waiting and ready to tackle any obstacle that comes our way.

I want to thank everyone for allowing me to have this experience and broaden my view on what the SGI is working toward. This experience has shown me what kosen-rufu is all about. It's not about getting everyone to become Buddhist, but enlightening everyone to what it means to become happy and live in peace. I think that it is amazing that the SGI members have so much compassion for one another. I now realize that you can go to another state, or go to another country, meet an SGI member and have that special bond with one another and an instant friendship. This is an experience I will never forget, and I hope that I can carry that compassion and strength to everyone I meet within and outside of the SGI.

I am determined to become stronger in my practice and as an individual. Thank you for allowing me to share my experience.

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