

EXPERIENCE—PAT KEATING AND LYNDA MARTINEZ, LOS ANGELES MOTHERS' LOVE KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES

In the fall of 1997, two SGI-USA members in Los Angeles, Pat Keating and Lynda Martinez, discovered they shared a dream. Both wanted to adopt baby daughters from the People's Republic of China. The road that led to this decision was unique for each of them.

Pat Keating: The journey to adopt a baby girl from China had started in the fall of 1993. I was working for a producer at Universal Studios and busily organizing her home files when I came across a *New York Times* Sunday magazine that she had kept for research. On the cover was a picture of a little Chinese baby girl in a red velvet dress. When I saw this picture, I burst into tears. Desire flamed in my heart. I wanted my own little Chinese baby girl, although I hadn't known it before that moment.

I had always wanted a family, but years after my divorce and a string of failed relationships, I was still unmarried and childless. Tears streaming down my face, I read the article and noted down the name of an agency in Northern California that was arranging for Americans to adopt abandoned Chinese girls. Age and marital status didn't matter. I had hope, but when I called the agency and started to pursue it, it quickly became clear that I didn't have the one essential ingredient—money! Nevertheless, I continued to make efforts and contacted the U.S. Asian Affairs office in Los Angeles and spoke to the director, Norman Nui, who showed me a whole scrapbook of happy families with their pretty Chinese daughters. But I had reached a dead end; without the money I could go no further.

I began instead a four-year career as a foster parent to four troubled children; an experience that proved to be fulfilling and rewarding in many ways, and heartbreaking in others. The heartbreaking aspect went with the territory; foster parents have to give the children back. Although several times children were placed with me that appeared to be eligible for adoption, it never worked out. But I did learn an essential truth about myself: I loved being a mother. It certainly was the most challenging and difficult job I had ever had, something that demanded all my internal resources.

During this time, an obstacle appeared at work. Seagrams bought Universal and my division was dissolved. Everyone was laid off. Fortunately for me, I was given a large severance package of an entire year's salary doled out over the course of a year. At the same time, I was offered another job. Since common sense dictated banking the money and continuing to work, that's what I did.

Before long the new job became hellish. It came to a head toward the end of my first year there. I didn't get along with my new boss, whom I viewed as unethical and sadistic. I left one Wednesday night determined never to return. After receiving good advice from a friend ("Don't quit. Call in sick and chant daimoku!"), I stayed home for the next four days and chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—two hours, then four hours, then six hours. That Sunday I chanted nine hours.

I did not want to go back to work, but I did. Although nothing had changed externally, something had changed inside me. The hours of chanting had filled me with confidence. The realization swept over me: Now I have the money to go to China! While I went

through hell on my new job, I had been depositing the severance from Universal regularly and it had just kept piling up. Once I realized I had the money, I made the decision to adopt a Chinese baby girl.

When I shared this decision with my friend, Lynda Martinez, she said, “You have awakened the dream that’s in my heart!” She decided to do the same thing, to go to China to adopt a baby girl.

Lynda Martinez: I had become aware of China’s dire situation of abandoned girl babies, met a few women who had recently adopted from Chinese orphanages and thought, “Oh, I’d like to do that.” But it was only a passing thought until several months later, I went to an SGI-USA discussion meeting and met another member’s teenage niece visiting from Hong Kong. I was impressed by this young girl’s sincerity and real commitment to kosen-rufu. She gave me a little key chain with the SGI colors on it, which I still have attached to my rearview mirror.

As we left the meeting, I said to my friend, “Oh, I’d love to have a daughter like that.” Suddenly I realized, “I can and I will! I’m going to China to adopt an orphaned child.”

So exactly four years later, Pat was back at the U.S. Asian Affairs office with Norman Nui and Lynda. Together they started the massive, and sometimes nerve-racking, process of paperwork and checkwriting.

Lynda: There were many detractors. Many friends and family said: “You’re crazy! You’re too old, you have no husband and you went through so much hell with your son when he was a teenager. Do you really want to go through all that again? You should be enjoying your life now, going on cruises, etc.”

It’s true. My 24-year-old son, Jimmy, had caused me to chant literally millions of daimoku and to seek so much guidance from my seniors in faith during his horrendous teenage rebellion. But it was also during those difficult years that I really grew as a person. Jimmy has now grown into an exceptionally fine young man. He’s practicing Buddhism sincerely and working for a large real estate agency. The wonderful relationship I enjoy with him today is one of the most amazing and greatest benefits of my 24-year practice in the SGI.

Pat: There were plenty of naysayers: “You’re too old, you’re single, your job is in turmoil!”, but I wasn’t swayed. My practice of Buddhism made it possible for me to fulfill a lifelong dream, my heart’s desire. I made a commitment based on faith. As my friend who also practices Buddhism told me, “What incredible determination that little girl has to propel herself to Los Angeles to do kosen-rufu!”

Lynda: I wrestled with doubt, agonizing over the question: “Could I really raise another child? Emotionally — physically — financially?” So once again I prayed as deeply and sincerely as I could. As I chanted, my determination to go to China was solidifying. Then I found a few words of encouragement from SGI President Ikeda in the *World Tribune* that became my sustaining motto, my silent battle cry — “No doubt, no hesitation.”

In the following months as I challenged all the paperwork, interviews and my own insecurities, I could always move forward with confidence just remembering those four words — no doubt, no hesitation. I cut them out, pasted them in my daily calendar and

referred to them constantly. In April when I lost my job, those four words, plus hours of chanting, pulled me through and prevented me from wavering in my determination.

In November 1998, Pat and Lynda went to Guangzhou China and then traveled by bus four-and-a-half hours to Yangdong City. On Nov. 17, the director of the Yangdong Child Welfare Institute placed Victoria Jane in Pat's arms. She was 10 months old. Lynda traveled two more hours to Yangchun City to receive Grace Lucille, 8 months old.

Lynda: The 11 days in China, during November 1998, were nothing but proof of the power of abundant daimoku. In spite of my many great fears, everything went so smoothly; I could feel all the prayers from my fellow SGI-USA members every step of the way.

And what has life been like since then? More benefits! Both Lynda and Pat determined to be stay-at-home moms, nearly an impossibility for single mothers. But both have received such incredible financial benefit over the past year that they have been able to stay at home to raise their daughters.

Lynda: Every day with Grace has been so joyful. My prayer and determination is to raise her to be a happy and fortunate woman who will contribute mightily to the cause of true peace in our world. During the 13 months I waited for the Chinese government to complete my paperwork and select my child (how exactly they choose your child remains a mystery, but we know it's based on karma), I chanted that the child would be vigorous enough to see age 95 in great health; she'd be smart enough to always support herself if necessary; and have a heart to contribute to kosen-rufu. Grace Lucille is now 22 months old, extremely healthy and bright, and participates in the Boys and Girls Group.

Pat: How fortunate I am to have Victoria as my daughter. Her beauty and her spirit astound me. My life has forever changed.