

PERSPECTIVE
A RADIANT SUNFLOWER OF WARMTH AND COURAGE
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NEW YORK CITY

Let the flowers of the Law

Bloom with beauty and purity

Throughout this land of America

(—Poem dedicated to the women of SGI-USA included at the close of SGI President Ikeda's "clear mirror" guidance, Feb. 27, 1990)

If I try to imagine a vast garden revealing the warm faces of beautiful and compassionate SGI women, I see in the center a gigantic, radiant, unbending sunflower bearing the countenance of Amelia Moran. When I think of the power of one woman to challenge adversity and to inspire countless others to blossom through faith, I think of Amelia Moran. I think about Amelia Moran a lot these days. Amelia began her practice of Buddhism on Aug. 25, 1972, and continued until her death last summer on Aug. 14, 1999. For 27 years she gave freely of her encouragement, warmth, courage and determination to countless SGI members and friends.

I remember the early days of my own practice, which began in February 1975. I practiced in Manhattan, but was always aware of the famous Brooklyn women's group whose presence I always felt at our community center. I secretly yearned to be one of the Brooklyn women, the "Daimoku Queens," whose deep struggles, chanting marathons and humble, warm and embracing, family-like spirit I envied. As a "Calypso Queen" in 1976, dancing up the Avenue of the Americas in a night parade that was part of New York's convention, I was overjoyed to be dancing alongside some of those Caribbean-born Brooklyn women, especially Amelia Moran, who was born in Panama.

I have many memories of Mrs. Moran, whom I knew only from a distance in the early years of my practice. She, myself and several others were part of the "regulars" who, in rain and snow, in the early '70s made it every morning to join Mr. David Kasahara in morning gongyo at our old New York Community Center. We sat in the front row chanting hours of feverish daimoku that ultimately led to victories in our separate desperate situations. I saw Amelia Moran whenever I participated in activities at the culture center. She seemed to always be there participating in some behind the scenes activity—organizing the production of costumes for conventions and parades; preparing food for various events; supporting the women's Sunrise Chorus; supporting the Spanish study department in the New York area; closing out the *World Tribune* subscription collections; and carrying out countless other administrative and leadership responsibilities.

At large meetings I remember looking forward to the determinations or encouragement given by Amelia Moran. Although her speeches were not the fanciest, she always conveyed her absolute determination and total confidence in the Mystic Law, leaving me inspired and joyful and able to say, "Yes!"

In 1988, I actually became part of the Brooklyn women's group by marrying a Brooklyn men's division member and moving to Brooklyn. I then had the opportunity to enjoy more firsthand encounters with Amelia Moran. She was the first to warmly welcome me to Brooklyn with her gracious words and a card. She was the first SGI member to visit me in the hospital with a gift from "Auntie Amelia" to my new daughter when she was born

10 months after I moved to Brooklyn. She supported and encouraged me and other struggling young mothers who were uncertain and confused by our new role. Mrs. Moran's consistent encouragement and confidence enabled me to continue in faith, despite exhaustion and hopelessness in what seemed to be an impossible transition from my youthful, unencumbered optimism to its ultimate translation into success in the real world as a working mother.

Mrs. Moran never failed to acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of others, no matter how great or small. When calling to leave messages and SGI communications for my husband, her co-leader, she never failed to warmly greet me, ask about each of my children, and listen patiently to the endless details of all of my sagas, as if that were the only reason she had called. On Mother's Day, on Father's Day there were always hearty congratulatory messages from Mrs. Moran. She brought my children little gifts to let them know that she was thinking about them and always delighted in their accomplishments.

The last time I spoke to Mrs. Moran, she was on her sickbed at home before her final hospitalization. She spoke briefly about her illness, but at length about her joy at having just seen my 7-year-old son's photograph in the *World Tribune* as emcee for the Boy's and Girl's Group meeting.

To me and to others, Amelia came to exemplify a new kind of pioneering spirit. Having been at the forefront of the early energetic expansion of membership in Brooklyn, Amelia was still always trying to forge ahead and break new ground. She exerted herself to change old habits and refresh her thinking by ceaselessly trying to digest President Ikeda's guidance.

Her favorite guidance from him was: "Whatever problems you may have, ultimately you chose to have them in this lifetime. In other words, you have your present problems so you can prove the power of *Myoho*. If you truly understand this point in the depths of your life, you will have no reason to fear problems. All you have to do is courageously overcome each one with the power of faith" (*Daily Guidance*, vol. 4, p. 222).

When faced with difficult challenges, she would always go back to her favorite passage from Nichiren Daishonin, which she recited by heart: "Although I and my disciples may encounter various difficulties, if we do not harbor doubts in our hearts, we will as a matter of course attain Buddhahood. Do not have doubts simply because heaven does not lend you protection. Do not be discouraged because you do not enjoy an easy and secure existence in this life. This is what I have taught my disciples morning and evening, and yet they begin to harbor doubts and abandon their faith" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 283).

In his condolence message that was read at Amelia Moran's funeral, President Ikeda said, "She was a mother figure in our kosen-rufu movement, and her warm and bright character was loved by all." Her own son, Ulysses, who completely understood her important SGI role, offered his condolences to more than 1,200 members who attended her funeral and two memorial services. He said: "I know that to many of you she was like a mother, too. She created a new kind of family and we are all part of it." Many SGI women remembered her as an example to emulate, determining to manifest their own "Mrs. Moran" spirit.

Feb. 9 is the anniversary of my joining the SGI in 1975—25 years ago. I also just celebrated my 50th birthday in January, which means I have now been practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism for half of my life. This is significant to me. Having fought major battles to overcome my inability to appreciate my life, I might subtitle my own human

revolution story, “Journey from NO WAY to Y-E-S!” To me, Amelia Moran’s spirit is the embodiment of “Y-E-S!” “Yes, you can do it!” “Yes, you must do it!” “Yes, you have the Gohonzon and there is no doubt that you will win!” “Yes, you will find the best solution to your problem.” When I face new challenges and my old tendencies of insecurity and fear rear their distorted, ugly heads to immobilize positive action, I well up an image of Amelia Moran, visualize the sunflower, take a deep breath and say, “Y-E-S, I can and I will! Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.”

I used to have confidence that kosen-rufu would happen, that it was guaranteed because Amelia Moran was here in Brooklyn and Mrs. Moran never gives up. Now Amelia has departed. As in the parable of “The Excellent Physician” who departed from this world so that his beloved children would stop relying upon him and drink the beneficial medicine themselves, I believe that in Amelia’s departure, she has passed on the women’s division baton. I believe others are ready to carry on the mission to provide strong and confident leadership through example and through warmly embracing others.

Although it may be that I am an azalea and not a sunflower at all, for this new 21st century and this new millennium, I emphatically say (deep breath—thank you, Auntie Amelia—sunflower—Nam-myoho-ren-ge-kyo), “Y-E-S, without a doubt I will blossom and use my power to spread beauty and purity in my Brooklyn community and throughout this land of America!”

(Note: Much of the information about Amelia Moran’s life was supplied by Donna Walker-Kuhne and Bret Kuhne.)