

EXPERIENCE—BARBARA JAY, ORLANDO, FLA. CHOOSING MY FUTURE

Barbara Jay revitalizes her Buddhist practice and discovers choices in her life through overcoming cancer.

When 1999 began, I evaluated my life and my practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. To my surprise, after 18 years of Buddhist practice, not only was I filled with discontent, I felt empty and barren. I loved the Gohonzon and the SGI members around me, but I distinctly knew something was lacking.

The trouble was I couldn't identify what it was or how to fix it. I didn't desire anything. I had no interest in anything. In hindsight, I was probably experiencing a mild depression because I felt trapped in my life. I felt I had no choice but to go on living the way I was, barely making ends meet and holding on to my job for dear life mainly because I needed it to survive.

I decided to plan for 1999 differently. For New Year's, I wrote out a list of affirmations and visualizations: I see myself thinner, healthier; I see myself happy, because I already possess it; I see myself with more money; I have enough money to live as I choose.

Then I made determinations toward my Buddhist practice to achieve the results that I wanted. I would devote myself to faith, practice and study, taking care of other members with my whole life. Based on "faith equals daily life," I would bring out my Buddhahood, challenging anything I thought was wrong or incorrect. I also chanted to become the best SGI member for the sake of society and the happiness of all SGI members in our area.

At my job I received an excellent yearly review. I got an "exceeds standards"—for my performance at a job that three years ago sent me to the doctor with an ulcer and my hair falling out.

Even though my review was a hard-earned victory, I excelled because I exerted myself in my Buddhist practice, not because I liked my job. I began to realize that no matter how hard I worked, I was not in a place where my work would bring me personal fulfillment. So in July, I woke up in the middle of the night and said, "It's time to change my life."

I decided to move to Seattle where the climate suits me better, and go back to school. My job had given me stocks that I could live on until I got there and found work. I was beginning to feel like I had choices. For the first time in my adult life, I felt like I might be able to do what I wanted, not what I had to out of duty or obligation or survival. I might not have to settle anymore; I could seek personal fulfillment in my secular life as well as my spiritual.

Then the results of some biopsies I had done came back—malignant invasive squamous cell cancer. I would have to see an oncologist to determine the course necessary to take to treat it. My world reeled, not because I was afraid of cancer or even death, but my choices might be taken away. This first feeling of freedom I tasted—to move or stay in Orlando, to leave or stay at my job—might all be removed. The threat of chemotherapy loomed, and so did the thought of losing more control over my life.

Our district had just started a wonderful phenomena—10-hour chanting sessions—thanks to our district leader. I knew it was time for me to do one immediately before I visited the oncologist. Members came out to help me throughout the day, and it was the

most amazing day of my life. I will never forget it.

I woke up to my alarm clock radio early that morning, and I heard an interview of a GYN oncologist who was describing the condition I had, the affect on my body, treatment and the perimenopausal woman. Most of the questions that were plaguing me were answered. I felt so relieved.

Members started arriving at my home and we began chanting. What a great morning!

After we had chanted four hours, I received a phone call from some members who just moved here from Los Angeles. They asked if they could come over to chant with me. As we talked, I discovered I was speaking to a cancer survivor who had been practicing for 13 years. This couple was chanting for the husband, who was to have surgery to remove cancer on Tuesday. I was so encouraged by the joy and life-condition I felt from them.

As I continued chanting, I came to a realization: No matter what this disease held for me, and no matter if I lived another 40 years or only four months, I would live my life for my kosen-rufu mission and do it with utmost vigor.

Immediately I felt what I had been lacking all year. Joy! I felt so good and so happy, so unworried and so determined. I knew my only regret in life would be if I didn't fulfill my mission.

After five hours of chanting, I checked my email and I received a letter from a gentleman I had communicated with on-line a month prior. He was asking how I was. After five hours of chanting I felt no fear. I emailed my phone number and invited him to call and find out. When he called, we were still chanting, so I told him to call later because I was having an open house for a good cause! Later when he asked what the good cause was, I told him it was me and that we were chanting to fight cancer. I found out he too was a cancer survivor with a phenomenal experience, and also did extensive work in cancer support groups. He was interested in Buddhism because he had become familiar with it when he had a malignant melanoma removed. He thought it was interesting that I was chanting a mantra for my cancer.

This was the beginning of a friendship that has further enriched my life.

In one day, I received encouragement from three tremendous sources without even having to leave my home! I looked at that piece of paper I had written my affirmations on—they were all met—every one of them. The oncologist said I did not need to return, laser surgery was all I needed. I was healthy and I was happy.

I introduced my Internet friend to Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and have brought several guests to meetings in the last few months. I was completely different at the end of 1999.

Instead of barren, I felt wealthy inside, as vast as an ocean that can absorb a big boulder that might fall in. I realized how much larger my heart and capacity are because of this practice, and that chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will bring out forces in the universe exactly when you need them.

I have choices. I will be in Orlando at least until March, and then I will chant and choose my future. Today I can proudly say that cancer is the best thing that ever happened to me.

My favorite passage from Nichiren Daishonin is: "The road from Kyoto to Kamakura takes twelve days. If you travel for eleven but stop with only one day remaining, how can you admire the moon over the capital?" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1027). I want to admire the moon over the capital all the time and will never give up. I have a five-year plan now—to get a master's degree. I have a future I am looking forward to. I am grateful to every SGI member I practice with and to Nichiren Daishonin and our SGI presidents for having the compassion for us all to use this wonderful key to achieve happiness.