

EXPERIENCE—IAN EHRENREICH, STANFORD, CALIF. THERE ARE NO ACCIDENTS IN BUDDHISM

Ian Ehrenreich finds a new appreciation for life after overcoming a traumatic leg injury.

A year ago, I suffered an unexpected injury that threatened to permanently change my life as I knew it. I had returned home from my first freshman quarter at Stanford University for winter break. Undecided in my major, I had spent that first quarter searching for my field of study and wound up frustrated as I had spent precious time taking courses which I might not need. Nevertheless, I was excited about going home and looking forward to being with my mother and brothers in Sacramento.

There was a problem at home. The manager of the mobile home park my family had moved into a few months earlier had given us a seven-day notice. We had to finish the skirting around the base of our mobile home to get the home up to park standards. When I arrived there were only a few days left on the notice. Although my brother helped with the skirting on the weekend, the high school he was going to wouldn't go on break for another week. So it was up to me along with my neighbor, who was helping for a small fee, to finish the project before the next weekend.

On Dec. 21, 1998, my neighbor and I began working early in the morning while my mother was at work. My little brother, Kevan, watched from inside as it was 30 degrees outside. It was so cold you could see your breath and my hands were numb. While cutting a panel with a power circular saw, somehow the blade of the saw caught onto my jeans and consequently got sucked into my leg. I felt weak and decided to sit down. My neighbor told me later that he saw blood spreading over my pants. He ran off to his house yelling, "Call an ambulance!" His wife called the ambulance and I was taken to the hospital.

At the hospital, I was told the blade had cut through 60 percent of my quadriceps muscles and tendons. From that instant, I realized the magnitude of this injury, but I had faith that I had been and would continue to be protected due to my eight-year practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. This fact became more apparent as the situation progressed.

I began to chant along with my family. I was told that there would be a lengthy wait to get into the operating room, but also that they would try their best to get me in before the tissue began to deteriorate I had about five hours. We called a few SGI-USA members and asked them to chant. They called other members who also chanted; I got into the operating room in nearly four hours. I knew this was due to the prayers of the members who were chanting for me.

My doctor really saved my leg. He stitched together the different layers of tissue and reattached a portion of my tendons to my kneecap. When I awoke from the operation, I was told that I was very fortunate; that I could possibly have never walked again had the saw cut one millimeter deeper. The saw had just missed my kneecap and since there are no major arteries on the front of the leg, I did not require reconstructive surgery.

The compassion and skill of my surgeon inspired such trust and admiration in me that I thought seriously about making medicine my field of study. My injury was critical, but it could have been significantly worse. I sincerely thanked the Gohonzon and was so appreciative to all the members for their support.

With the support of my family, SGI friends and the helpful people from my dorm, I rapidly recovered. The wound entirely healed within six weeks. Much of this was due to the skill of my surgeon whom I got to know during the many office visits. Through my strong Buddhist practice and determination, I progressed through rehabilitation in a little over a month.

I enrolled in courses needed for premed and realized I had found my field of study! I will be a doctor of medicine. My recovery spanned one quarter of school and in retrospect, it was probably the most difficult, but extremely rewarding period of my life. I had to use a wheelchair. Because my room was on the third floor of an all-frosh residence dorm that had no elevators, I had to move into a first-floor room in an upper class dorm. This required me leaving my friends at the all-frosh dorm. I felt really alone.

It was during this time that certain SGI-USA members and college friends helped me maintain a positive outlook on life. Every day, I would wheel myself to class, but individuals from my previous residence dorm oftentimes helped me by pushing me to class. Also, friends would take me to dinner with them and that really helped me to not feel too separated from the environment that had become my new home during my first quarter at school.

Many SGI friends would come over to chant with me and would take me out to dinner or to meetings. These individuals really helped me to maintain my practice and faith, and connection to the SGI.

By the end of the winter quarter, I had finished rehabilitation and had full functionality of my leg. It was still weaker than my other leg, but I had regained a level of mobility that I had not had since before my injury. I remember fondly a time early in the spring when I jokingly chased after one of my friends, running at a very fast pace. While doing this, I realized that I could run and I felt deeply appreciative to be alive and to have recovered fully from my injury.

I believe that this accident happened as a sign that I needed to strengthen my Buddhist practice. It helped me to realize the very human arrogance that had become entrenched in my life. This injury helped me to see that I was living in a manner that was blind and unappreciative.

Indeed, this experience helped me to appreciate many things. It made me appreciate my youth and the opportunities that are present in my life and the fact that I can take advantage of these opportunities. It made me appreciate my family and the strong support of the SGI-USA. It made me appreciate my doctor whose skills made it possible for me to walk again and gave me a firm direction in my field of study. But above all, the accident made me appreciate the wonder of this practice and the power of prayer to the Gohonzon. My Buddhist practice protected me and knowing this fact has truly deepened my faith.

Last year I was chosen as the representative from our area and I was able to attend the SGI-USA Youth Grand Culture Festival in Los Angeles. The spirit of the festival was so awesome. I had the great benefit of being able to reconnect with other youth whom I had met in 1997 at the Florida Nature and Culture Center during the Junior High and High School Conference.

My brother, Ryan, is now a freshman at Stanford and I'm a sophomore. Our New Year's determination is to start a Buddhist Club at Stanford to share this philosophy with other students. Above all, this accident made me realize the great fortune that I have and has deepened my resolve to live a life filled with compassion, not only through my field of study, but through sharing this Buddhism with others, which is the greatest act of compassion.