

## TOWARD THE NEXT 30 YEARS: STAGE CREW MAKES FRESH START

**Mike Liptan**, Portland, Ore.: For two months in 1975, I was a member of the advance stage crew for the Hawaii Convention. At age 32, I had never worked so hard in my whole life. This experience and training have made the 25 years of working and activities since then seem easy. I was only a member for about one year and this helped me establish and continue my practice through which I have gained tremendous personal fortune and happiness. My stage crew experience was truly a treasure of the heart. From another stage crew member, I heard a definition of the concept of being a hero that I think applies to all the dedicated members of the stage crew:

*Heros  
Ordinary people who,  
under exceptional circumstances,  
Do exceptional things!*

Besides all the fond memories and friendships, that's what it feels like to participate and work for kosen-rufu. What a wonderful and victorious feeling!

Al Hogan, Waukegan, Ill.: In the late '70s, I was asked to coordinate the culture festival presentation for my headquarters. My dream to produce stage shows and concerts had begun. Bringing people together and creating wonderful performances culminated with the 1st Youth Grand World Peace Culture Festival in Chicago in 1981. All the great struggles to bring each aspect of these productions together united me with stage crew members throughout the SGI. I have many fond memories that will live on forever. The negative side of my life surfaced, and I spent eight years spiraling deep into the world of drug addiction. Finally in 1989, I started my ascent. Using passages from the Gosho, daimoku and the will to claim my role in the battle for world peace, I have turned poison into medicine. Today my life is the result of "one who has fallen to the ground and pushed himself up from that same ground." I have determined to be a role model manager in my workplace, to resolve all personal issues in my life and raise capable people.

**Jim Engelman**, Vallejo, Calif.: Working with stage crew members, I saw all different types of talented people who worked together toward a goal for the Sho-Hondo Convention in 1973. Something in my heart said this is how society should be. I was only a three-month member at the time. Although I had financial fortune, my own home at 22, a good job, still I was miserable. My relationships with women were short term. My impossible dream was to be happy. On my first project with the stage crew, I worked with an extremely talented guy. I knew there were so many skills I could learn from him. I didn't realize it at the time, but the most important "skill" he taught me was faith. He made me feel the spirit and dedication of working toward our noble goal of kosen-rufu. I learned about unity and flexibility. I learned patience and humility. I learned that with hearts joined as a team, we can reach the impossible. Today my personal dreams have come true, as well. I am happily married. My children are all successful. My daughter practices and has given us a wonderful grandson.

**Teri Childs Page**, Concord, Mass.: I had a tremendous experience renovating (July 1998–February 1999) our Boston Culture Center. At first I thought what a great opportunity to do a little artwork. Little did I know! I worked every weekend, sometimes scraping, sometimes painting and mostly dealing with dust, dirt and grime. It was the most valuable experience in my SGI years. Only toward the end did I end up uniting with other artists and creating actual wall designs and beautifying the lobby. We chanted many hours together trying to unite. Because of this effort, I have been able to bring many of my friends to the culture center, one of whom received the Gohonzon last fall. I also married the man who designed an incredible walkway and who has encouraged me to pursue a life of my dreams. Our efforts to build our castle together has created an indestructible bond. Together we faced enormous obstacles — and won! I hope to continue in this way, forever building and helping to construct a new SGI-USA.

**Kitty Thompson**, Chicago: During the construction of the Chicago Culture Center, I primarily volunteered to do landscaping. As a teacher, I had the weekends and entire summer off.

One day, while watering the plants as I'd so often done, I was asked to come inside the Ikeda Auditorium and speak the words “Testing 1-2-3” repeatedly as I was directed by a young man from up in the sound room. From that point on, I have been a member of the audio-visual team in Chicago.

In his book *Learning From the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, SGI President Ikeda writes, “It may be that those responsible for the sound system at meetings, as a result of the good fortune they gain thereby, are creating the cause to be reborn as great musicians.”

This was not my dream; however, it is, was and always has been my son's. Now 26 years old, he has practiced since the age of 5. I was not initially supportive of his dream to become a musician. I only imagined hardships and financial struggle for him.

However, this has not been the case. He is an accomplished jazz bassist, formerly the musical director for Maynard Ferguson and currently playing with saxophonist Stanley Turntine. He has traveled around the world and has actualized his dream. This has been my greatest joy and good fortune as we both continue to practice and work for kosen-rufu.

**Bill Jones**, Denver, Colo.: In 1975, I was working in L.A., preparing for the Hawaii Convention, I had been writing home to my parents about what we were working on. My father, who was a long haul trucker, went to the return address on my letters the next time he was in Southern California. He went, with his big rig, to the Malibu Training Center. There Mr. Inaba was very kind to him and told him how to get to the Culver City warehouse where we were working.

As a father now, I better understand how he must have felt, wanting to get a look at what on earth his son was doing 1,000 miles from home.

I was called to the front entrance to meet him, and I walked with him through the work areas where artists were high on scaffolds painting backdrops, carpenters were working hard, welders were making sparks fly. We went up to my work area, where electronics assemblers were working on prototype equipment, draftspersons were diagramming new projects, coordinators were running around with clipboards.

It gave me pause when he looked at me in astonishment, and said, “What in the world is motivating these people? I've never been in any work environment where everybody is

concentrating and putting out such great effort.” He said he would love to see the result of all this effort, but it was impossible with his workload. I suggested that he could send my mother to Hawaii.

My mother was in the early stages of cancer, which would take her life two years later. She went to Hawaii and made many friends on that trip. The fact that she participated to the best of her ability helped take some of the edge off my sorrow when she passed away. I took so much for granted back then, and people struggling to make a dream such as our Hawaii activities come true were just routine to me.

My father’s impression of our work was so profound, because he, like many people in our world, had learned not to expect much out of people. To see people living and fighting for a dream shook him even deeper than the practical cynicism he had developed as a defense mechanism.

My greatest benefit is to quite often realize how great it is to be alive, and to have friends in the SGI, and a mentor like President Ikeda.