

ONE BRAVE WARRIOR STANDS UP FOR PEACE



Young Women's Division Conference 2000



by *Alexis Trass*,
 Gary, Ind.

“One Brave Warrior Stands Up for Peace!”

This was the theme of the young women's division conference held at the Florida Nature and Culture Center June 15-18. One hundred fifty-seven brave warriors from across the United States gathered together to form

bonds of friendship with one another and to strengthen their Buddhist practice.

It was difficult not to notice how the young women's faces shone with a brilliant light as we attended each conference session. We laughed excitedly as Renu Jiandani, the SGI-USA young women's leader, gave a lecture on "Letter to Misawa." We appreciated Danny Nagashima, the SGI-USA general director, taking time out of his schedule to talk with us about the mentor-disciple relationship. In addition, there were sessions

on Soka Spirit, leadership and overcoming depression. Each session served the purpose of helping every young woman become a truly brave warrior.

All the young women felt completely comfortable sharing their lives and struggles with one another at this conference. Several participants spoke of feeling they were not alone in the challenge to realize kosen-rufu. The entire group of young woman left the FNCC with the determination to become beacons of hope in the SGI and the communities in which they live. ♪



Stephanie Araiza, Seattle

I feel so fortunate to have been a part of the most amazing gathering of young woman I have ever experienced. I had the opportunity to work a little behind the scenes for this conference. I was honored to help create such a wonderful kick-off for the young women in the 21st century.

My determination for the conference was to awaken the Soka Spirit in myself and in the lives of the young

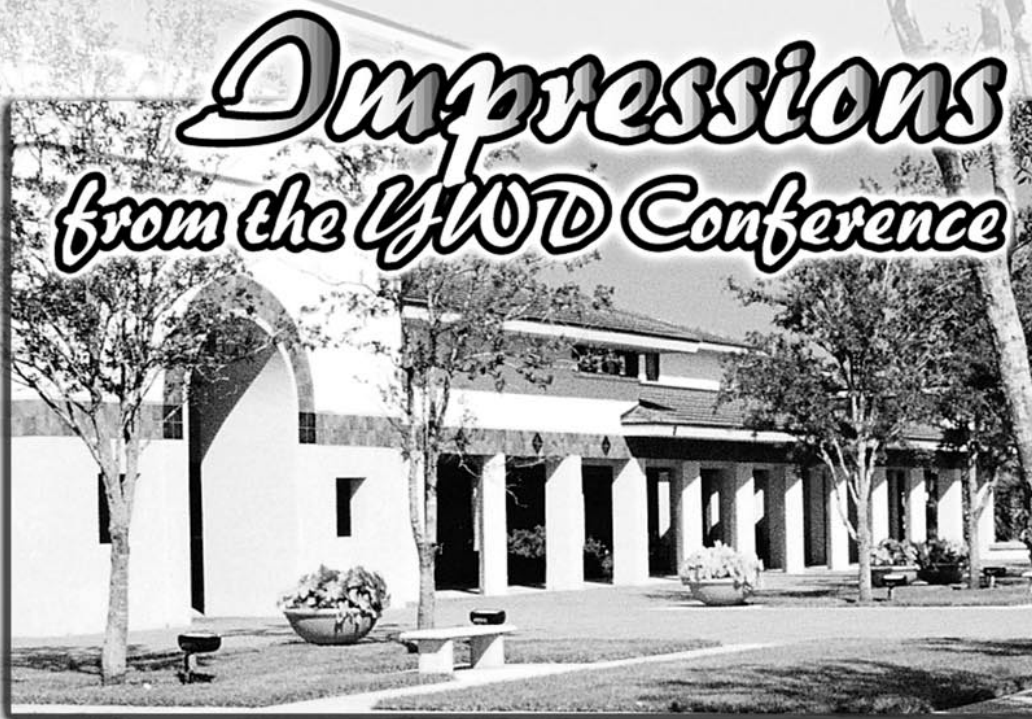
women who attended, and to have them go home and help others grasp a deeper understanding of what the Soka Spirit is. So many of the participants told me throughout the weekend that they wanted to take what they learned back to their districts, and they made me feel confident that I had sisters all across the country striving for the same dream as me.

I have never felt so alive! I am determined to help foster, in all of our members, an understanding of how special this Soka Spirit movement is, and how rare an opportunity we have to fight together with our mentor. ♪



Brandi Whitmore, Los Angeles

The YWD conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center was an even greater experience than I imagined it would be. My heart was so touched by the spirit and sincerity of everyone there. I felt deep appreciation for how fortunate I am to practice this Buddhism. I really began to understand what it means to stand up alongside SGI President Ikeda to fight for and protect this wonderful practice and care for our members with all our hearts. I also realized how important it was for me to take what I had learned and experienced and bring it back to share with as many people as I can and really implement it in my daily life. That's where I will show proof of how amazing this practice is. ♪



Christine and Miranda Dell, Wyoming, Mich.

Our trip to the FNCC was so wonderful! It was amazing that even though young women attended from all over the country, it seemed like we were all lifetime friends. The bonds at the FNCC are so strong, the only way to feel that is to go there! We strongly encourage everyone to make the challenge and go to the FNCC! ♪



Emi Gwin, (third from left)

Emi Gwin, San Diego

One Brave Warrior Stands Up for Peace." What a profound theme. This was the theme of our young women's conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center for the year 2000. More than 150 young women gathered together to create a bond that stretched across the nation.

I was amazed at how so many of us were struggling with the same types of difficulties. It was as if we were on a mission to gather and encourage one another. On the flight back home to San Diego, I realized that in four days, I had grown more than I had in the past year. My life

was filled with this energy that was radiating from my heart. The lessons that I had learned while at the FNCC could not be taught anywhere else. They were life changing and brought a whole new perspective to my role in the SGI.

In our sessions, we covered very real and powerful topics. At the end of each session, I would say to myself, "That was the best one." Then we would have another session that was just as spectacular. A conference like this stays with you for the rest of your life. The faces, the names, the hearts — they are all unforgettable. These are people who helped change my life.

My appreciation for SGI President Ikeda's generosity and one of his gifts to us, the FNCC, has grown a thousand times stronger. As we made a joyous departure from the FNCC, I made a promise to each and every person there — I, as one brave warrior, will stand up for peace. ♪

(See page C for more Impressions)

YOUTH *Study* AUGUST 2000

The Gohonzon Transcends Time

Patricia Ford, Kansas City, MO

“Since the Buddha’s passing, two kinds of images, wooden and painted, have been made of him. They possess thirty-one features but lack the pure and far-reaching voice. Therefore, they are not equal to the Buddha” (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 85).

Frequently when Buddhist thought and practice are discussed in the media in this country it is about one of two kinds of Buddhist schools: Zen and Tibetan. Very rarely is it about Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. How many of you have been asked if you have read a book about Zen and motorcycles? Or about celebrities that embrace Tibetan Buddhism?

Zen and especially Tibetan Buddhists often use mandalas (sacred diagrams) for their prayers. Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism also has a mandala, the Gohonzon. Tibetan and Zen Buddhists use images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for meditation in their mandalas. This is one obvious difference between Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism and other Buddhist sects. We use no images of Shakyamuni or other Buddhist figures. This is because the Gohonzon encompasses the 32 attributes of the Buddha as Nichiren Daishonin states in the above passage. If we worshipped or venerated an image of a Buddha, we are focusing on just one Buddha, not all the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and different functions of the universe and the Gohonzon itself. Nichiren Daishonin states that the pure and far-reaching voice of the Buddha “cannot be captured either in a painting or in a wooden image” (WND, 85). “The Buddha’s pure and far-reaching voice, which once vanished, has reappeared in the visible form of written words to benefit the people” (WND, 86).

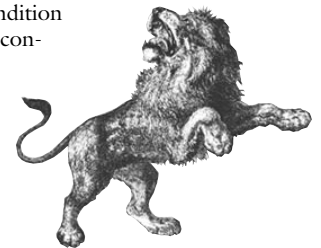
To understand why we use no images of deities in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, we must remember that the Gohonzon was bestowed for all

humankind by Nichiren Daishonin by the use of words. Words, not images, have a far greater impact in making change in the world. Although images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas may be bound by time, the Gohonzon is timeless. ♪

(There are many fine books about different kinds of Buddhism. One that is useful and accessible is William R. LaFleur’s book *Buddhism*.)

QUESTIONS *for discussion*

1. How do you discuss Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism with others? Does it depend on how much knowledge of different kinds of Buddhism people whom you talk to have?
2. How do you understand the Gohonzon? What do the various words on the mandala represent?
3. What kind of life-condition does the Gohonzon contain? Does it contain that of the inscriber, Nichiren Daishonin?



(Impressions continued from page B)



Nicole D. Collier, Atlanta

After years of seeking and spiritual evolution, I recently found my home with the SGL. I joined the organization and received the Gohonzon on June 3 of this year. Two weeks later I had the awesome experience of going to FNCC to attend the young women’s conference. I truly enjoyed my experience there. I met a multitude of people and came away with a wealth of information. I rejuvenated my mind, body and spirit.

My initial impression was how diverse a group we were. I saw people from many different ethnic and cultural groups, and it amazed me again and again. Through this diversity, I gained a myriad of perspectives about the practice. Within this mix I talked to everyone

from “fortune babies” (members born into the practice) to those who recently joined the practice. The common bond was that everyone was very supportive of me and sincere in their own practice.

I learned a lot about the practice and about people in general during the conference. For instance, I gained insight about Soka Spirit and began to have a better understanding of the mentor–disciple relationship. I also developed a new outlook about my own human revolution.

The peaceful surroundings offered me the wondrous opportunity to invigorate my mind, body and spirit. I ate delicious, healthful food, rode around the campus on a bicycle (what memories that brought back!), tanned and relaxed by the pool, and chanted daimoku to a beautiful Gohonzon and by a lake under a full moon.

I had a great experience at the young women’s conference. I’m excited about my life in the practice. I know that joy and struggle are ahead and I am ready to win! ♪

Trailblazers!

by **Boston Snowden,**
SGI-USA Vice Student
Division Leader

"Those who have a mentor in life are truly fortunate. The path of mentor and disciple is one that leads to personal development and growth. Those without a mentor may appear free and un beholden to anyone, but without a solid standard or model on which to base themselves their lives will be aimless and wandering." (Faith into Action, p. 234)

Currently, I work as a teen counselor in Oklahoma City. Many of my clients look to me as their mentor. As a counselor I've found that most of the youth that I talk with have very few mentors. Mentors are very important. I remember growing up in Brooklyn, N.Y.; I had no real goals or dreams other than to be a professional athlete. My mother, a single parent with two children, always encouraged me to practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. It took several years before I got the courage to chant, and about a year after that I started to read SGI President Ikeda's guidance. The more I read his guidance, the more I started to feel as if he was talking directly to me. How wonderful! I began to go through all sorts of obstacles and, without fail, each time I picked up the *World Tribune*, there was President Ikeda telling me to stand up and keep fighting. I had found a mentor who I could follow. I began to dream the impossible dream.

The youth I work with are like I was — poor and without many dreams. As a counselor I learned the most effective way to lead young people to become self-directed. My discovery was partly due to my experiences, but while chanting for the wisdom to be effective in my new profession, I picked up the *World Tribune*. "It is important to have compassion to respond to person's needs and situations, to give considered thought to how you can best help him or her and then take appropriate action. Wisdom comes from compassion" (2/24/96 *World Tribune*, p. 7).

Recently I have been reading a book by Arthur Levine and Jana Nidiffer entitled *Beating the Odds: How the Poor Get into College*. This book describes how 24 college students escaped poverty through the compassion of a caring adult mentor. *Beating the Odds* describes the mentors as being people from various backgrounds but sharing four common attributes: "a common worldview about the value of hard work, a belief in education as a central ingredient in success, a sense of bi-culturalism, and a belief that they can make a difference."

I am determined that every client who walks into my office will walk out with a smile and a new outlook on life. To be looked upon as a mentor is a great honor. Mentors bring hope to those who need encouragement and direction in life. Let's all mentor someone! ♡

Experience**Emiko Gatineau**

My name is Emiko Gatineau from Watsonville, CA. I am in the seventh grade. A few weeks ago I attended the first Santa Cruz Chapter Junior High and High School Division Meeting. It was a lot of fun. I was born in this practice since both my mom and dad chant, as well as my brother, sister-in-law and my grandparents. Ever since I can remember I have loved dance.

Even when I was 3-1/2 years old in preschool, I remember asking my mom if I could take ballet classes with my friend after watching her dance. And I have been dancing ever since.

For more than three years I have been with a dance group that does competition dancing in the San Francisco Bay area. This year I have been doing a lyrical dance, which is between ballet and jazz. Before each dance competition, I try to do gongyo with my mom and dad. My dance group had been doing well, receiving gold awards and some platinum [awards] at competitions. I also was doing well but not as well as the other studio, the #1 studio in Northern California and our competitor. Before a competition, my mom would encourage me to chant that my dance would touch the hearts of the judges and the audience. Last weekend we had our last regional competition in Alameda. Many studios from the Bay Area were there, including our competitor. The morning of the competition I looked in the program and it said that I was the only one competing against two lyrical dancers and was glad that no one from our competitor's studio was dancing against me. But before I was scheduled to go on they added six more soloists in my age category and all from the top studio! I suddenly started to get more anxious and nervous. I began to chant softly under my breath remembering what my mom had said, "Dance to reach their hearts."

Finally my turn came. I danced to the song, "I Will Remember You," and I looked at the judges and saw the smiles on their faces. When I finished I could tell they loved my dance. I felt that I had danced my best ever. And my group dances were the best also. When the awards presentation was announced, I received the top lyrical award with a platinum and my group won first place in jazz, tap and lyrical, beating our previous competitor. We had finally won!

We were all very happy. In addition to competing, what I enjoy the most about dance is performing for the community. My group has danced at malls, the boardwalk, First Night in Santa Cruz, and the Monterey Bay Aquarium. In the last two years we have also performed with Linda Arnold, a local children's songwriter and singer. And we have also made two CD's singing with her. This year she has asked us to make a video with her. I really enjoy these performances, watching little kids come up front and dance with us. All of us have fun.

One of my most recent benefits is that our studio was asked to perform next summer at EuroDisney, in Paris and in Munich, and at the annual dance festival in Innsbruck, Austria. I had not realized how well-known we were. The promoter who selected us travels throughout the country and selects the top five studios to participate. It will be an exciting and challenging year for me. I hope I can reach out to thousands of people through my dancing, based on my Buddhist practice. ♡

MATERIAL REQUEST

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