

Toward the Civilization of the 21st Century!



Ed Feasel, Dean of Students (pointing), describes Peace Lake, which will be in front of the Student and Community Services Building.



SUA faculty member, Jay Heffron (third from left), leads a tour in front of the Daisaku and Kaneko Ikeda Library.



A Visit to SUA Family Day

By Karina Barrios, Los Angeles

How do I begin to describe this place — this haven we watch being built from the ground up? On Aug. 5, there was a family day held for those interested in attending Soka University of America located on top of a hill in Aliso Viejo, Calif. My whole family made the trip in support of my sister, whose desire is to be part of the first 100 students to attend this university. We were late, arrived during lunchtime (perfect timing, in my opinion) and offered a personal tour around the grounds.

Our guide spent almost an hour trying to construct an image of what the campus would be like when completed. This construction project is supposed to be the eighth largest in California — pretty impressive, I might add. There is to

be a Student Services building — sort of like a town square, completely with a post office, banking services and even a market. The dormitory was quite impressive, too. Each room had its own bathroom and every floor had its own laundry and living room. In terms of a facility, there is nothing quite like it. But there's more to it than just the buildings.

The faculty chosen is apparently nothing less than excellent. There are 17 now on board who were selected from among many applicants. I've heard some speak, and

they've already inspired my life. With their sincerity to educate, mold and serve those new students, I'm sure that strong heart-to-heart bonds will be made. This is quite significant, for these students will be at an age where finding out who they are will be crucial. To have this magnitude of faculty guiding these students, it seems almost impossible not to succeed.

Which brings me to those 100 students. What lies ahead in their future seems boundless. They will be given the opportunity to be pioneers of the 21st century. What

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types of sports, art, music, literature, language and culture are taught will be their choice.

It must feel so wonderful to know that you have already left footprints behind, that tradition began with you.

It's important to realize the significance of this very moment, to have deep appreciation for all those who have contributed to the realization of a dream passed on from one mentor to another. I can't explain the excitement I felt and still feel, or the wonderment that such a place exists, for this is where the lions and lionesses will dwell, accomplishing their mission "as world citizens in solidarity for peace" — where great people are going to develop into great leaders, and where the struggle for peace will begin. ♪

USHONDA'S FNCC Experience



Ushonda (second from left) together with fellow members from San Diego.

Living Up to My Pledge as a 'Brave Warrior for Peace'

By Ushonda Wilson, San Diego

June 15–18 and 27, 2000 — these are very significant and unforgettable days I will reflect on for the rest of my life. The first four of these days, June 15–18, I had the great fortune to go to the fabulous Florida Nature and Culture Center for the 2000 Young Women's Conference.

In SGI President Ikeda's message to us, he stated: "I hope that your conference will be filled with harmony, joy and cheer as you expand and strengthen your bonds of friendship. Please be convinced you will always be embraced and protected in this circle of good friends" (*Seize the Day*, July 14, p. B).

I feel this sentiment perfectly expresses what I felt and achieved at this gathering. I was so encouraged by those who shared their life-changing experiences. I gained so much from the sessions I attended—some of which focused on overcoming depression, the mentor-disciple relationship and Soka Spirit.

I also experienced tremendous harmony with my four SGI-USA sisters in faith who accompanied me. We grew even closer. In the depths of my life, I felt all of the young women who participated in this conference had individually shared similar experiences with me in our past lives, therefore we definitely expanded and strengthened our bonds of friendship. This feeling was confirmed when we gathered into a giant circle arm and arm singing to one another, "That's What Friends Are For." I could not stop crying tears of happiness!

My prayer and goal before I left was to take everything I learned at the FNCC and apply it to my daily life. I also wanted to share the conference with as many people as possible so they

could do the same. Daimoku is powerful!

Shortly after my return from the conference, I was scheduled to have back surgery due to my ongoing battle with scoliosis. Scoliosis is curvature of the spine. Mine was the result of deformed vertebrae.

Throughout my life I've had numerous surgeries to correct the problem. My last surgery was in 1990, when I needed metal rods placed in my back to stabilize my spine. But within nine years, both rods had broken and it was necessary to remove them.

Before the surgery on June 27, my doctor told me I would spend a minimum of three days to a maximum of two weeks in the hospital for recovery. Everyone expected a routine operation without complications.

However, as I write this, I've been in the hospital for a month and four days. Waking from the surgery semi-paralyzed from the waist down, I am unable to walk. I feel pain (which is a good thing) and can feel certain areas of my legs and feet when touched, but my legs move only during muscle spasms.

I'm not angry about having presently lost my ability to walk. In fact, I feel that this obstacle is one of the biggest benefits of my life. I've been forced to stop everything in my life — my job, SGI-USA activities, hanging out with friends, etc. I'm able to really take a closer look at where my life is going and what it really means to me.

I'm quickly finding out what all the phrases I've heard growing up in the SGI really mean. Phrases like, "Doing Kosen-Rufu," "Changing Poison into Medicine," "Going Through My Human Revolution" and "Attaining Absolute Happiness."

SGI President Ikeda has shared many exam-

ples of how he has put these phrases into action and has shown us how to use Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to attain the supreme state of life every human being seeks.

One of the session lectures at the FNCC was on the writing, "Letter to Misawa." In it, Nichiren Daishonin states:

Although one studies Buddhism, it is difficult to practice it correctly because of the foolishness of his mind, or because, even though one may be wise, he follows an evil teacher and fails to realize that he is being misled. Moreover, even though one may encounter a good teacher and the sutra of the true teaching and thereby learn the True Law, inevitably, at the time when he resolves to free himself from the sufferings of birth and death and attain Buddhahood, he will encounter the three obstacles and four devils, just as surely as a shadow follows the body and rain is accompanied by clouds. Even if you should manage to overcome the first six, if you are defeated by the seventh, you will not be able to become a Buddha. (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 894)

Even though one has fortune to encounter the correct Buddhist teaching, we are still not guaranteed to become happy! Happiness lies only in our attitude toward our obstacles. We must become happy through our own individual struggles. This is President Ikeda's wish. We can fulfill our mentor's prayer with the attitude of practice for ourselves and others. This current obstacle is my mission. I have no doubt I will walk again.

I realize my recent trip to the FNCC was the solid foundation to help me overcome my present situation. It has provided me with the wisdom and strength to help me challenge not only the paralysis in my legs, but also everything else that has slowed down the process of me personally attaining absolute happiness in this life. I'd like to end with another quote from President Ikeda's message to the young women's conference:

Whatever hardships you may be facing now, please turn them into a source of prayer. Improve yourself each day, do your utmost for the sake of others, and study hard so that you can actively and freely contribute in the field of your mission. Nor should you be hasty. Rather, please always base yourself on daimoku, and steadily build a foundation of indestructible fortune.

We all made a pledge at the FNCC to become brave warriors who stand up for peace. I am literally being put to the test to live up to my pledge. I am determined to show actual proof with my life. Profound thanks to my family and friends for their constant encouragement, support and daimoku! ♪



Winning Over Ourselves

By Wendy DeSouza,
SGI-USA Student Division Leader

Some day
The savage in us will wear away.
Some day quite clearly
Men will see
How clean and happy life can be
And how,
Like flowers planted in the sun,
We, too, can give forth blossoms
Shared by everyone.
— Langston Hughes, “Some Day”

Though one defeats a million men in battle, one who overcomes the self, alone, is in fact the highest victor — *the Dhammapada: Sayings of Buddha* (p. 39).

What are so-called devilish functions, and how do we win over our weaknesses? Last year I asked a women’s division leader in Japan that question. She quoted second Soka Gakkai President Toda who used to say that negative influences never come around, saying: “Knock, knock! Here I am!” The important thing, she emphasized, was first to pray to recognize negative influences within our lives. We also have to pray to the Gohonzon that we will never be defeated by our weaknesses.

We are often defeated by negative influences because they are hard to detect. They are “insidious,” defined by Webster’s *New World Dictionary* as that which “[operates] in a slow or not easily apparent manner; more dangerous than seems evident.” We speak of devilish functions, negative influences and fundamental darkness as the workings in our lives that keep us from growing. Nichiren Daishonin refers to a demon as a “robber of life” or a “robber of benefit” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 87). The Daishonin also states: “Should you slacken in your resolve even a bit, devils will take advantage” (*WND*, p. 997).

We know that our inherent weaknesses block our ability to develop our faith. What we don’t know is how to see them for what they are. Judeo-Christian culture and pagan folklore have taught us that demons are hideous, supernatural creatures. We have certain mental images for demons or devils: a red man with pointed horns and staff, the Boogie Man that lurks in the dark, etc.

From the perspective of Buddhism, so-called demons or devils are none other than functions in our lives. Self-doubt, for example, is difficult to see as a devilish function. Nonetheless, we suffer from it when the root cause goes unrecognized in the subtleties of our thoughts.

An article featured in *Living Buddhism* describes fundamental darkness as the “ignorance of or disbelief in the Buddhahood within our lives as well as the lives of all people. Buddhas are those who are aware of their fundamental darkness and always strive to challenge their weaknesses. Put another way, to reveal our innate Buddhahood and make it our foundation we need to see and strive against our innate life-negating nature” (July 2000, p. 11).

Our negativity is a constant function within our lives, a permanent facet of life. When we confront this negativity with our courageous daimoku and



study of the Goshu, our Buddha nature is strengthened and the “devil-like” function is weakened. To think, however, that the devil is outside us is to be mistaken. Granted, there are social evils and injustice in the external realm. Yet if we do not understand our own “fundamental darkness, not only will we stagnate and decline, we will have a tendency to blame, criticize or hold grudges against others. We render ourselves powerless to defeat our own inner demons and change our environment. We may remain silent while injustice is being committed because we don’t feel responsible; we may lean toward being self-righteous and lack true compassion; or possibly, we may see ourselves as martyrs or victims and contribute to the cycle of injustice.

Since I started studying the history of the Soka Gakkai and the injustices endured by the three presidents, I began to see more clearly my own negative tendencies. I realized I had the same potential to harm as corrupt authorities, and the only thing that made me different was that I had made a conscious choice to recognize and tackle my weaknesses. At first, I wanted to ignore certain, shall we say, unattractive qualities within myself. I thought: “Yuck! Why did I chant to see this in my life?” But as I kept chanting, I began to understand it was a great breakthrough. After thorough study and more experience in human relations after college, I realized that devilish functions are natural to human life. My job is to win over them — win over myself — and help others do the same.

In *The New Human Revolution*, SGI President Ikeda writes that a Buddha must always oppose injustice and transform negative influences into positive influences. The story of Shakyamuni’s enlightenment is most telling: “Devilish functions thus continued to plague Shakyamuni even after he had become a Buddha. They vied to attack him through even the smallest breach in his heart. A Buddha is not a superhuman being; one who has attained this state continues to experience problems, suffering and pain and is still subject to illness and to temptation by devilish forces. For that reason, a Buddha is a person of courage, tenacity and continuous action who struggles ceaselessly against devilish functions” (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 3, p. 153). ♪

MATERIAL REQUEST

SEND IN YOUR STUFF
Our youth publication is only as strong as what you bring us.

Poems, Articles, Pictures, Stories, Commentaries, Pulitzer Prize insight ...whatever you got, get it to us.

HOW?

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By Nobuko Kobayashi,
SGI-USA High School Division Leader

Thoughts on the JHS/HS Conference 2000

Yes, I understand that when everyone talks about the Florida Nature and Culture Center and shares their experiences, they all say almost the same thing: that it is a life-transforming experience and that, of course, the food is good. Well, you know what, this was my second time attending this conference and I wanted to say it was a completely life-transforming experience and the food was great! This time I was able to work behind the scenes and I have a new understanding and admiration for those who participate in making these conferences great, especially the staff at the FNCC for their tireless efforts to make the conferences special for each member.

I was so amazed by how much each person went through to either get to the FNCC and/or to just stay there. The majority of the members who attended our conference were under the age of 18. Despite their young ages, they had persevered through financial, health, school and family problems. When hearing impressions on the last day, I could feel a sense of victory that they had overcome what had plagued them before they came to the conference. I also felt the warmth and love of everlasting friendship.

SGI President Ikeda has said: "In a way, we could say that your problems represent the problems of all humanity. In that respect, your victory will open the way to victory for the youth of the entire world. It will also illuminate the path along which humanity must advance in the 21st century. You are the hope of America and the world!" (*World Tribune*, Feb. 25, p. 4)

This passage contains the theme of our conference and represents the bulk of what the conference stood for: to listen and learn from one another's struggles and to create victories from those struggles; to realize and take responsibility for the mission of making a difference, not only in our own areas, but for humanity and the world.

I wanted to take time to share excerpts from an essay written by 17-year-old Victoria Kraus of Los Angeles. She was responding to the essay question, "Why do you want to attend this conference and what do you think of the theme 'We Are the Hope of the World?'" Victoria writes: "Every generation of youth has had some kind

of impact on the next generation, and now it is our turn to impact society in a positive manner. We should take advantage of that time and make every moment count. Youth really are the hope of the world, because it's what we do that will pave the way for other generations. I think it'd be a good idea if we as youth kept a positive vibe on life and

"Every generation of youth has had some kind of impact on the next generation, and now it is our turn to impact society in a positive manner." — V. Kraus

this event possible and, oops, I forgot to thank specifically the volunteer chefs that made us all full and happy. ♪

We Advance

By Michael Henniger, Seattle

*Poised before the great mountain of the 21st century
Eyes burning bright beneath lion king crowns
Armoured by perseverance
Armed with the courageous pulse of life itself
We advance*

*Setting aside petty egoism, foolishheartedness and favored illusions
With the hope and trust of humanity in our hearts
We advance*

We will never yield, never falter, never sacrifice a single, noble comrade

We, the youth of the SGI

*Inheritors of the most noble mission imaginable
Raised in the tempest of mappo's hellish haze
Trained by the pioneers of a golden age
Will create an unprecedented jewel of society
Compassionate and just*

*Fulfilling each and every one of our precious mentor's dreams in our lifetimes
Cherishing the daily struggle, protecting the sanctity of life
While never begrudging the exhaustion in our limbs*

*Awakening justice worldwide with the truth of a mighty lion's roar
We advance!*

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Wonderful Friends

By Christine Pinson, Fullerton, Calif.

*Wonderful friends
come join me now
let us talk about our dream
let us talk about our future.
Chanting for peace across the
nations spreading the word about
how to stop the violence
not just changing our lives
but touching those
who come in contact
with our electricity and power.*

*We are the future—
We are the students—
We are the youth of SGI.
Wonderful friends
come join me now
we have a lot of work to do
anything is possible
if we use our hearts.
We are the youth of SGI
making a difference today
for tomorrow.*

everything else, just so that history will not repeat itself. If people want changes it has to start from within each and every individual."

Again, I want to thank every-

one who made this event possible and, oops, I forgot to thank specifically the volunteer chefs that made us all full and happy. ♪