

**UNFORGETTABLE FRIENDS FROM AROUND THE WORLD  
DR. MARIA DE NAZARÉ DA FONSECA SOLINO OF BRAZIL  
BY SGI PRESIDENT DAISAKU IKEDA**

***In this series, SGI President Ikeda has recorded his impressions of the many friends he has made in his travels for peace. In his New Year's poem in the January issue, he states: "I will continue to knock on the doors / Of diverse cultures and civilizations, / Seeking out the humanity that is vibrantly alive / At the heart of each, / Believing that sincere dialogue/In search of our shared humanity / Will build a rainbow bridge linking the world."***

***Brazilian doctor Maria de Nazaré da Fonseca meets with SGI President Daisaku Ikeda and his wife Kaneko in Sao Paolo, Brazil, in March 1993.***

Maria de Nazaré da Fonseca Solino is a Brazilian doctor. In 1993, during our extended visit to South America, my wife became ill, and it was Dr. Nazaré — as she is fondly known by all — who looked after her with deep concern and tender care.

Dr. Nazaré says: “The greatest benefit I have gained since joining the SGI is that I have been able to feel appreciation for others. Perhaps because I had such a hard life, I used to look at others with the attitude that they owed me something. But after embracing faith in Buddhism, I came to realize that I must become the sort of person who asks instead what I can do for others.”

Dr. Nazaré is from the small town of Tocantins in the lush forest lands of northern Brazil. In those days, it was a poor town where cowherds brought their livestock to be butchered. “My mother apparently arrived in Tocantins already pregnant with me, and with a small boy — my brother — in tow. I don’t know where she came from. She became a washerwoman for the cowherds of Tocantins, and it was in that town I was born. They say that a native Indian man used to visit my mother, so perhaps my father was an Indian.”

Suffering from complications after giving birth, Dr. Nazaré’s mother was sent to a hospital in the distant city of Belém for treatment. On her way back to Tocantins, the plane she was traveling on crashed.

“My brother and I became orphans,” relates Dr. Nazaré. “A couple whose daughter had recently drowned in the river took me in — an unnamed newborn infant whose date of birth was not known. I have no idea what happened to my brother. I don’t even know if he is dead or alive.”

Dr. Nazaré left her hometown at 7, when she was sent to boarding school in the big city, Rio de Janeiro. Until then, she had spent her days running about naked in the forest. Her only toys were clay dolls. Now everything had changed. The school was very strict, and it was hard for her to get used to the constraints imposed upon her. She felt very lonely and withdrew into her shell.

Dr. Nazaré first learned that she was adopted when she was 10. The news came as a shock. When she heard how her real mother died, she pledged in her young heart to contribute somehow to prevent the repetition of such tragedy for want of readily available medical care.

She became a doctor, specializing in intensive care. Her patients were those hovering on the fine line between life and death. “I wanted to save lives,” she says. But after becoming a doctor she learned a new, harsher lesson: Death is an inescapable part of life. Again and again, she witnessed patients’ final struggles with death. Some patients were beyond the help of medicine. All she could do was hold their hands and pray that they would be free from pain and suffering.

Dr. Nazaré’s adopted father died in an accident, when she was 13. He was a free-spirited, independent man who used to spend more than six months of the year in the forest searching for

gold and diamonds. “My father taught me,” she recalls, “Never be afraid. Be a strong person. Be strong, so that you can survive.” Her adopted mother remarried, but her second husband also died after only a few years.

What is death? What is destiny? What is family? These questions haunted Dr. Nazaré.

At the end of 1986, she came to a decision: Next year she would find happiness, she would find what she had been searching for. Something was missing in her life. She had studied hard. Gone to Germany to further her knowledge. Gained experience as a doctor. Encountered different religions. Yet there was an unassuageable emptiness inside her.

On New Year’s Eve, she went to the hairdresser. She was drawn to the cheerful, energetic personality of one of the women who worked there. Hearing from her of the “Buddhahood within,” Dr. Nazaré joined the SGI and started practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. “At first I used to pray to meet my brother and my blood relatives,” she remembers. “But gradually my prayers changed to wanting to meet the family with whom I am linked by bonds far deeper than any blood ties.”

I myself first met Dr. Nazaré some time after my wife did. My wife and I both wanted to express our thanks to her for her kindness, so we invited her to come along with her mother, Mrs. Leni da Fonseca Solino, to the SGI Brazil Nature and Cultural Center in São Paulo, where we were visiting. We also wished to show our special appreciation to her adopted mother, who had worked so hard to raise her, so we planted a tree in her honor.

The moment I laid eyes on her, I thought, “Here is a strong mother who has bravely endured the unendurable, never showing her tears to others.” I said to her: “Your happiest day is yet ahead of you! Please put your mind fully at ease.”

When her mother became ill two years later, Dr. Nazaré nursed her with tremendous devotion, determined to create the happiest day in her mother’s life. When she recovered, her mother said: “You are an astonishingly good daughter. You are my most precious treasure.”

I told Dr. Nazaré, “You are part of my family, a very precious member of my family. The parents whom you have lost have been reborn. There is nothing to be sad about.”

Dr. Nazaré is unmarried. I hoped that she would devote her maternal energies to her fellow members, acting as a big sister who’d comfort and protect them.

Says Dr. Nazaré: “My encounter with the SGI gave me the most precious family of all. It gave me my own roots.”

The wind is invisible, and so, too, is the human heart. But the wind moves, and so does the spirit. We speak of the three existences of past, present and future, yet we cannot see them. But Dr. Nazaré is surely in no doubt of the eternity of life.

All of us are born alone and die alone. And yet none of us are truly alone. Nor are our encounters limited only to this lifetime; they are due to profound connections in our past lives, bonds that will continue on into future existences.

The grim reality, the indignities, of many intensive-care patients on the verge of death is one from which many people might recoil. Something rare and precious, however, exists in that final passage. Many of Dr. Nazaré’s patients speak to her of their lives and their families. The flame of life blazes brilliantly once more before death. Dr. Nazaré senses in that flame something pure and of great dignity. The sum of each person’s life is told in those moments. And a surge of deep love and compassion for all existence wells up in her heart.

Dr. Nazaré is a wonderful emissary of Bodhisattva Medicine King. She confronts the sufferings of life and death: as a doctor, from without, and as a Buddhist, from within. Like her father, she is fearless. Like her mother, enduring.