

## EXPERIENCE—GARY DE VEYRA, LOS ANGELES HEALING FAMILY WOUNDS

**Through his Buddhist practice, Gary de Veyra helps his family heal the wounds of abuse.**

I began practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism on July 10, 1988, at the age of 17. Since then, at the start of every year, I write down my goals and from time to time, I return to them and happily check them off as "mission accomplished." One of these goals has been to create a stronger, closer relationship with my family.

This past October, I had the opportunity to support the SGI-USA Southern California Zone meeting at the Los Angeles Convention Center. I assisted two young men who had what I thought was a crazy idea to chant three hours a day for the success of the meeting. "Do these guys have a life?!" I thought. I had not chanted that much in years, and I remembered how hard it was then. Reluctantly, I went through the motion of chanting this much every day both for the success of the meeting and my own personal goals. Besides, I was on vacation for a week, and what better time to challenge myself and catch up on some daimoku!

Three weeks after the meeting, which was a success, I received a phone call from my sister, Jennifer. She asked me if I could come over to her place. Annoyed, I asked her why. She broke down in tears and said, "I just need my brother right now." Apparently, she also called my parents, and we all drove to my sister's place hurriedly.

When my sister opened the door, she looked as if she just walked through miles of desert; she was completely exhausted. That's when I noticed her arm covered in blood. It looked like a big cheese grater had been dragged over her wrists several times.

Immediately, my parents and I attended to my sister's injuries. She yelled at us not to call the hospital and to sit down and listen to what she had to say. That evening, my sister poured out everything about her life that we didn't know; some horrific things that I would never wish on anyone.

Apparently, Jennifer had been grappling with her past and felt she was losing control. Up until this point, the only other people she confided in were her therapist, her fiancé and our brother. She would not tell anyone else because she feared the family would reject her. And as for the self-mutilation, she did her best to hide it from us by always wearing long-sleeve shirts whenever she visited or at family gatherings.

In the course of the evening, a very deep and personal wound opened up in me—some things experienced with my other siblings from a long time ago. When we were little kids in the Philippines, our nannies and sometimes even our grandmother emotionally and physically abused us. Our beatings were not for discipline; we annoyed them. We were kids, and we annoyed them.

To this day, we don't know why they had to resort to hitting us, whether repeatedly on our heads with a closed fist, or several times across the face or beating us with a broom handle. At times they would humiliate us in front of our friends by stripping us down bare naked and locking us out of the house. The kids in the neighborhood would just laugh at us. But we didn't make it easy for them; we were usually dragged outside kicking and screaming.

That night, I kept my sister company until the wee hours of the morning. At some point, she even had me count all the slash marks on her wrist. After 50, I lost count—maybe because there were too many, maybe because my eyes were filled with too many tears.

The very next day, I took the day off from work, emotionally and physically drained. I chanted with my fiancée. That evening, hearing about what happened to our sister Jennifer, my eldest sister, Valerie, drove down from Santa Barbara and met with me, my brother and our parents. We told our parents everything about the abuse we suffered during our childhood, and my brother told us more about Jennifer’s horrific experiences when she was a teenager. I have never seen my father cry so much in his life. In fact, he didn’t just cry, he wept. He could not believe how such terrible things could happen to his children. It was a big family therapy session, and we all aired our dirty laundry.

I thought to myself: “Wow! This is what came out of my prayer! This is our opportunity to become closer as a family!” I felt like I could start sharing anything with my family. (Of course, now my mom and dad know how much marijuana, LSD and everything else I took when I was a teenager.) That evening was full of tears, full of hugs, full of laughs and full of love with my family. It was the first time in my life that I told my brother I loved him. Now every time I see my family, I always tell them that I love them, something I never used to do.

My siblings and I had done our best to overcome our painful childhood. My sister Valerie had developed a mean streak, which she is now dealing with; my brother Lib forgot quite a bit of what happened to us as a way to deal with it; my sister Jennifer completely broke down and was diagnosed with clinical depression. As for me, I told my family that I never forgot any of what happened to us. I told them I was able to overcome the past through my practice of Buddhism. With simple conviction I said, “That’s why I am a Buddhist, that’s why I chant!”

I realize how fortunate I am to have the Gohonzon and to be practicing Buddhism, because otherwise things could have turned out much, much worse than they did. I believe that through my Buddhist practice, I touched my sister’s life and helped our family deal with a past we were either ignoring, denying or didn’t see. Through my prayer, my family is stronger than ever before. I cannot say that this mission is accomplished, but we are well on our way.