

EXPERIENCE—KATHRYN D. BROWN, PHOENIX NOT TAKING BUDDHISM FOR GRANTED

Facing the possible end to a 20-year career, Kathryn D. Brown uses her practice to save her job and beat a life-threatening illness.

My professional career has been in the criminal justice field since 1978. I was appointed to the Parole Board in 1991 and was reappointed in 1996 to serve through January 2001. In February 2000, I also was appointed chairman of the board. When Arizona Governor Jane Dee Hull took office in 1999, I had two years left to my appointment, and I was told that the governor would not be re-appointing any current board members at the end of their terms. So, for the first time since 1978, I faced the very real possibility of being unemployed.

At the same time, a couple of years ago, I quit smoking, not an easy feat. I gained weight and started having problems with indigestion. Last year, I started having severe pain in my chest and experienced frequent bouts of nausea. When I had an episode of nausea that lasted an entire weekend, my doctor set me up for an abdominal ultrasound that revealed gallstones and a mass on my right kidney that needed to be examined more closely. I was concerned but not quite afraid yet.

A few days later, an MRI revealed that the mass on my right kidney was about the size of a golf ball. The MRI technician said the mass looked like a ball attached to the outside of my kidney.

I tried to contact my doctor several times for the official results, but my calls were not returned. When I finally did see the doctor, two weeks later, the doctor seemed perplexed about what surgeon to refer me to. Now I was getting concerned. Gallstones I could live with for a short while, but the mass on my kidney had to be addressed immediately.

It was this lack of communication between the doctor and I that woke me up. I was facing some serious problems and had to become serious myself. I was chanting on a regular basis, but my gongyo was not consistent, and I was not as active as I could have been in the organization. I took my concerns to the Gohonzon and made a determination to win.

I started to chant at least an hour a day and began doing gongyo regularly. I started reading every *World Tribune* and *Living Buddhism* I could get my hands on. There was also one letter by Nichiren Daishonin, “The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra,” that I kept close by. “Spur yourself to muster the power of faith,” the Daishonin says. “Regard your survival as wondrous. Employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1001). If I was going to win, I would have to revitalize my practice and become stronger than ever.

After a period of confusion and frustration—I was referred to the wrong doctor twice—I was finally referred to a urologist who explained the situation with my kidneys. We viewed the ultrasound films and the MRI results, talked about the tumor and what surgery would entail. I felt very comfortable with the doctor and asked him to schedule the surgery. I left with more confidence and continued my daimoku campaign.

The surgery was on the morning of Dec. 19. The doctor had to remove my right kidney. Apparently, the tumor had grown from the inside out, and the kidney could not be saved; the tumor was made up of blood, muscle and tissue, but was benign and presented no threat

to other organs. However, the remaining kidney was not functioning properly at first. A kidney specialist prescribed a diuretic to jumpstart it, and it finally began to function.

The surgical incision from the procedure completely healed while I was still in the hospital. There was no discharge or bleeding whatsoever, and I was able to return home in just a few days. The following week, the doctor removed the staples, and two weeks later I saw my new primary care doctor. The attending nurse assumed it had been months since the surgery, because I had recovered so quickly.

Back at home and recuperating from surgery, I continued to practice, attending activities with the spirit that I would show actual proof of the Gohonzon's power. While chanting at the Phoenix Culture Center one day, a light bulb went off. I had been taking my Gohonzon for granted throughout my 13-year practice with my inconsistency, building fortune then losing it, due to my own neglect.

Throughout my life, every 10 years or so, I would have a major health issue. In 1981, I had an ovary removed; in 1990, I had a complete hysterectomy; and now in 2000, I had a tumor on my kidney. I had to get it together, or what body part would be affected 10 years later? That is when I determined never to take my practice for granted again.

I decided to go back to work toward the end of January, but a week before my return, I received a call from the chief general counsel to the governor. I was advised that the governor had appointed someone into my position on the board. I was then told that the governor's office had contacted the director of the Department of Corrections, and that I would be offered a job with them. I had no idea what type of job it would be. The governor's office had never interceded on behalf of a board member before when his or her term expired. I immediately ran to my altar and thanked the Gohonzon.

At the interview, they explained the position at the Department of Corrections. I was offered a position as an associate deputy warden working in Prison Operations as the female programs administrator. Of course, I said yes. The kicker is that I am making the same salary I was as chair of the board, which is in the range of what I had chanted for. I did not lose any state service time and I started my new job on Jan. 29, the day the new board member who took my previous position started his term. I was given a position exactly where I wanted, with the money I wanted and at the time I needed it.

I feel that both of these situations I faced served as wake-up calls to my life. By refreshing my determination and dedication to practice wholeheartedly, I was able to turn poison into medicine.

One of the things that I read throughout this experience was SGI President Ikeda's guidance from *For Today & Tomorrow*. The Jan. 29 entry reads: "Practicing Buddhism means being victorious. In advancing one step at a time amid the realities of our daily lives, in showing concrete actual proof, in becoming victors and successes, we are demonstrating with our very beings the validity of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and serving as a source of hope and inspiration for those who will follow us on the path of faith."

From this point on, I will strive to win in every aspect of my life. And I hope that I can provide some ray of hope for others. I will never again take my practice for granted. Ever.