

## EXPERIENCE—PAT NAKANISHI, PEARL CITY, HAWAII FINDING HAPPINESS BY LETTING GO OF A GRUDGE

**After spending much of her life suffering with her relationship with her mother, Pat Nakanishi uses her Buddhist practice to change things around.**

From the time I was a baby in New York City, my mother, Ella Tilles, suffered from severe manic-depression. When she was “up,” she helped my father run his bridge club and went dancing and gambling at other clubs, leaving my brother and I on our own. When she was “down,” she stayed at home crying, worrying and wringing her hands. Since my father worked long hours and my brother was rarely home, I was left to care for my mother on my own.

Despite my home life, I was a good student and felt I was at last able to escape by going away to college. Although I appeared to be doing well, I was very insecure and saw a psychologist about my fears and anxieties. He told me that talking about my childhood with him was half the battle. When I asked him what the other half was, he said that he did not know.

After my graduation from college in 1969, I came to Hawaii in the Teacher Corps program. When a Hawaiian student introduced me to Buddhism, I knew right away that chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo was going to be the other half.

Fourteen years later, in 1983, I sought guidance from two pioneer members. I told them that I appreciated all my benefits and my life, yet I knew that I could not do any more human revolution (inner reformation) until I cleaned out the deep grudge and hatred that I had been carrying toward my mother throughout my life.

They encouraged me to appreciate that she gave me life and to understand that I was born to her so that I could clean out my karma. They told me that if I did not clean it out, my children would carry the same feeling toward me! Since my oldest son, Keola, was starting adolescence and starting to have an “attitude” toward me, that comment really pierced my life and made me determined to challenge and overcome this resentment. They encouraged me that if I introduced my mother to Buddhism, my mother and I would develop the kind of relationship that I thought was impossible.

With stronger daimoku and greater confidence, I put their advice into action. My mother had been living in Hawaii since my father died and had attended many SGI-USA meetings with my family. She agreed to join and reluctantly began to chant. For the next 10 years, she refused to acknowledge any benefits, although other people saw great changes.

Finally, in 1993, my mother gave an experience at a district discussion meeting that began with “I started chanting 10 years ago, primarily to make my daughter and family happy, even though I didn’t really believe in it.” Her two-page experience ended with “Looking back over the 10 years of practice, I can see now how much my physical health, mental health, finances, friendships and family relationships have improved.”

Two months after my mother gave that experience, she had the worst nervous breakdown I had ever seen. At times, she was incoherent and hysterical; at other times, she would stare off into space. She refused to eat or take her medication and would fall down. I was teaching full-time and raising three children, so I couldn’t adequately take care of her myself. I chanted for her protection and for a clear sign of how to help her. When I called her doctor, he immediately recommended hospitalization.

In 1953, my mother was in the locked ward of a mental hospital where they gave her shock treatments. Since then, she has refused any psychiatric help. On the way down to the hospital, she was screaming and crying: “No, no, don’t do this to me! How could you do this to me?” It was a nightmare for both of us.

When we got to the emergency room, my husband and I spent five hours alternating between chanting and trying to convince her to sign in voluntarily so that she would not be locked up again. Just when we were going to give up and have her committed against her will, she grabbed the pen and signed the appropriate form.

Her three-week stay in the hospital was the turning point in her condition and in our relationship. She received the therapy and treatment she needed. Talking with her psychiatrist helped me to accept in my heart, not just my head, that my mother had been a victim of her illness and had not purposely made my childhood miserable. Seeing her in such a terrible condition also helped me to feel compassion for her instead of the anger, bitterness and resentment that I had always felt toward her. Finally, we were both cleaning out our fundamental darkness.

The last three years of her life were the most peaceful and joyful. She accomplished all of her goals—to be physically and mentally healthy; to be financially independent; to have friends; to be closer with me; and most of all, to be an important part of her grandsons’ lives. In 1995, we celebrated her 78th birthday at our twins’ (Julian and Jesse’s) high school graduation party.

In 1996, Keola graduated from college. Two months later, my mother was hit by a car while crossing the street. She was brain dead on arrival at the hospital. There were no broken bones or bleeding—she looked like she had fallen asleep and never regained consciousness. My husband, Miles, our sons and I stood in a circle around her bed, held her hands and chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo while the nurse turned off the life support system, as had been her wish. Ten minutes later, she died peacefully and a little smile appeared on her face, where none had been before. Her body went from being hard and cold to being soft and warm. Miles and I stared at her and at each other in amazement because we had heard about the enlightenment of the deceased for more than 25 years, but this was our first time seeing it.

Many of Miles’ relatives and our teacher friends came to my mother’s Buddhist funeral and as a result, we were able to talk about Buddhism with them. One of my teacher friends received the Gohonzon and introduced her fiancé (now her husband) to this practice.

After going through that experience together, our family became much closer. Keola and I began to have a more positive relationship, communicating better than ever. Julian has become more expressive and appreciative about his feelings toward our family. Jesse has asked to have my mother’s Gohonzon transferred to his name and begun to practice Buddhism again, this time on his own.

I have learned two lessons from this experience: First, it is self-destructive to carry a grudge, and it is important to let it go before it is too late. Second, raising our life-condition is truly the reason for our practice and the only thing that matters for eternal happiness.

More than anything, I have finally accepted that it was my chosen destiny to be born to my mother so that my circumstances would lead me to the Gohonzon and to discovering my Buddha nature. After 32 years, I deeply appreciate my Buddhist practice that has empowered me to change my life tendency from negativity and self-doubt to happiness and self-confidence.