

EXPERIENCE—TAKAKO LEWIS, LOUISVILLE, KY. DETERMINING TO WIN IN ALL BATTLES

Following her mother's example, Takako Lewis uses her Buddhist practice to overcome health problems and provide support for her family.

In 1957, my mother joined the Soka Gakkai after she was told that she had only three months to live because of tuberculosis. Being the oldest daughter of 12 siblings, I saw my mother's suffering first-hand. She was extremely ill, sometimes vomiting blood, but we were so poor she could not afford medicine. What little money we had my father spent on alcohol. Despite these dire circumstances, my mother vigorously participated in Soka Gakkai activities and chanted a lot of daimoku. She overcame tuberculosis and extended her life for 39 years. As her daughter, I became determined to win whatever battle life threw my way.

On Aug. 15, 1998, I began to bleed from my right nipple. I hurried to a hospital and had numerous tests, but the cause of the bleeding was unclear. The hospital referred me to another hospital, and again, the cause remained unknown. I went to three different hospitals, but nothing was found. Yet because of the bleeding and the pain, I knew this was not just my imagination.

After additional visits and tests, a cyst was found in a mammogram. It required an operation to remove it. I immediately began to chant for a successful operation and for the doctor to perform his best. During the operation, the doctor found two small lumps in my right breast, which were also removed during the same procedure. Tissue from the lumps was sent to pathology and came back confirming second stage breast cancer. We also found out these lumps would have been very difficult to find in a mammogram. When the doctor informed me of the severity of my condition, I was numb.

For three days, my husband and I chanted through tears and read *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* and SGI President Ikeda's guidance. We also determined to chant two million daimoku together. Nichiren Daishonin's words "[Chanting] Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the greatest of all joys" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 788) became our touchstone and our feelings of grief turned into courage. We began to have hope.

When I went back to see the doctor, I was told that there were two options: a mastectomy (complete removal of the breast), or a lumpectomy (removal of the growth). In either case, the operation needed to be performed quickly. When we went to the hospital to talk to the surgeon about the pre-op, I asked what type of operation I should have. He told me he couldn't tell me which procedure to take, but if it was his mother or his wife, he would recommend the lumpectomy. I made up my mind and had the lumpectomy the following week.

Thanks to a lot of daimoku, the surgery went fine and it was followed by a central node biopsy. Unfortunately, the biopsy was a disappointment. The results indicated that I had four lymph nodes positive for cancer. This meant that I would have to undergo a very severe treatment regimen. Though my husband and I were initially shocked, we resolved to overcome this obstacle with faith.

Obstacles also appeared within our family. Our daughter began having difficulties with her job and lost her car. Our son started doing drugs, dropped out of high school and no longer came home on a regular basis. One day, while driving a friend's car, he apparently

passed out or fell asleep at the wheel. He ran his friend's car into a brick wall and totaled it. When I saw the car, I was surprised that he was alive and relieved to find out that he only received a small cut and some bruises. The car belonged to my son's friend's parents, and we were fortunate that their insurance paid for the car and they did not want to sue.

My husband and I have always prayed for our children's protection and that they would grow up to be capable people for kosen-rufu. We decided to chant even more daimoku to realize this prayer. We also began going to our daughter's home to do gon-gyo and chant with her.

Friends and other members came over to our house to chant with us through this very rough period. We received letters of encouragement from members all over the world, as well as support when I returned home from the hospital.

Through all of this, I gained a deep sense of gratitude toward the Gohonzon and determined to chant for those who are suffering. My husband's family and our neighbors often visited and eventually some of them decided to receive SGI-USA publications. I was able to take three of them to a women's meeting, and two of them began to practice Buddhism.

I had a total of seven operations and continued with chemotherapy and radiation. In the morning, when I sat in front of the Gohonzon to do gongyo, I felt I had already won over my illness that day. Every day I had to fight, yet I never missed gongyo. When I asked my doctor what were my chances for survival, he said 60 percent. I determined that my chances would be 110 percent, and decided to make up the other 50 percent with daimoku.

My husband was so supportive, it was as if he was trying to protect my life with his own. While I was recovering in the hospital room, he held my hand while laying on the hard floor without a bed or pillows, chanting for my recovery. When I was having a difficult time because of the chemotherapy, he told me to rest, and he would chant the daimoku I was unable to chant. Every day he would chant two or three hours. The chemotherapy was very hard, but with his support I was determined to win.

The Daishonin writes: "Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life, and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 681). This sense of determination and the support of those around me helped me through this ordeal. The result is that now I am in better health than I could have hoped for. Recently, my doctors ran the usual tests and discovered that there is no evidence of any cancer in my body.

My family has pulled through as well. My daughter has graduated from college, was on the dean's list with a 4.0 grade average and is currently pursuing a career in nursing. My son has a good job with a large bank and has completed his GED. He has also just returned from his first trip to the Florida Nature and Culture Center. No matter how many times I am reborn in this world, I always want to be the wife of my husband and the mother of my two children.

I feel tremendous gratitude toward the Gohonzon, SGI President Ikeda and my friends and fellow SGI members for their support and encouragement. Because of them I am able to share this experience. I will continue to repay this debt of gratitude for the rest of my life. With faith in the Gohonzon, there is no way I can lose.