

EXPERIENCE—SUSAN ANDRUS, NORFOLK, VA. APPRECIATING THE STRUGGLE

Through her Buddhist practice, Susan Andrus learns that true happiness and freedom exist in the process of struggling to attain her dream of becoming a writer.

I began practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism two years ago. In March of this year, I was fired from my job.

At the time, I was shocked that my attempts to work with my supervisor would result in my being escorted out of the building. As I walked toward my car preparing to have a big "pity party" when I got home, the SGI member who introduced me to this practice asked me why I was leaving so early. I told him I had just been fired. He said, "Congratulations!"

Immediately, he helped me change my perspective from self-pity to appreciation. At first it didn't last long, but that remark and other events, including going to the Florida Nature and Culture Center, helped me turn my life around.

The day after I was fired, I went to Raleigh, N.C., to a Culture Department workshop. I felt blue and irritable and did not really want to participate in the trip or the activities, but since I had already made the commitment, I went along. I tolerated the joyful attitude of the others in the van as we rode to Raleigh but could not appreciate or join in their good humor.

By the end of the day, after talking with other writers and artists, I became aware that many people were in transition either because of work, family or career changes. I realized that I was not alone and that it was possible for me to change careers and pursue my goal of being a writer.

A few days later, out of work, I determined to support myself as a freelance writer. I had saved some money intending to buy a car and figured that between my savings and unemployment insurance, I could support myself for about six months.

My district leader told me that she had registered for a writer's workshop at Barnes and Noble Bookstore but she couldn't attend because of another commitment. Because the workshop was full, she offered her registration to me.

I attended the workshop and learned how to submit my writing to publishers and how to get an agent for the book I had started writing a year ago. During this time, I chanted up to two hours a day to keep my focus on my goals and overcome the depression that told me that I was not worthy, not good enough, and could not be successful in work, relationships, or love.

Around the same time, another SGI member cancelled her reservation to the FNCC Arts Division Conference and I received an e-mail indicating that someone was needed to fill the slot. I remembered how the Culture Department meeting in Raleigh helped me overcome my doubts about becoming a writer so I decided to make the effort and invest some of my savings to attend the conference. Quite fittingly, the theme of the conference was, "Never Give Up On Your Dreams!"

In the meantime, I started working on getting an agent for my book. I found a list of 140 agents on a Web site and tried to set up a process on my computer to print them each a letter. What a struggle! Everything I tried presented a technological obstacle. I wanted to mail them before I went to the FNCC, but too many obstacles blocked my way.

At the FNCC I heard many experiences that guided and transformed me from the person I was on May 17 to the person I became by May 21. I learned to spend the first 15 minutes of chanting every day to appreciate my life—the negative as well as the positive. I especially chant to appreciate the negative because, just like my experience of being fired, these events turn me in a new and better direction.

During the conference, I heard an artist say that rather than chanting to do better works of art, he chants for his clients. I now chant for the agents, the publishers who will consider my manuscript, and my readers. I learned from another speaker that if I don't change my causes, the effects will make me continue to experience the same obstacles over and over again.

I also learned to keep a pad and pencil near my altar so that when I chant, I can write down my ideas so I'll remember them when I finish chanting. I have generated so many good ideas from doing this.

Some famous people attended this conference and through them I discovered that they are regular people with difficulties just like the rest of us, struggling to do their own human revolution.

In the first two days after I returned from the FNCC, I figured out how to print the letters and mailed them out to the potential agents.

But today I am happy. I have received more than 100 rejection letters from those I mailed to the 140 agents and two letters from agents who were initially receptive, but then had to decline because too many books on similar topics had already been published.

I published an article on the Internet and began receiving royalties in September. My savings have dwindled but I have enough to pay my bills for a few more months.

At the writers' workshop, I learned that publishers usually give an advance to first-time authors of between \$25,000 and \$50,000. I'm chanting for \$75,000. My days are bright. I am executive director of my office at home and every day is a dress-down day.

In "The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1001), Nichiren Daishonin states: "A coward cannot have any of his prayers answered." Every day I pray for fearlessness so that I can use my writing skills to work for the happiness of others.

I read in the *World Tribune* that there are more than 10 million SGI members practicing in the world. When we say the last prayer in gongyo, we pray for "peace throughout the world and the happiness of all humanity." Every day I feel those 10 million members praying for my happiness, propelling me forward to realize my dream of becoming a writer!