

**SPEAKING OUT FOR PEACE
BY LEAH STENSON
PORTLAND, ORE.**

On Oct. 8, an anti-war editorial that I wrote was published in *The Oregonian*, Oregon's major newspaper. The article, including my photograph, was a column and a half in length and ran side by side with an article by Michael Kelly, the editor of the *National Journal*, who maintained that pacifism is "intellectually dishonest, elitist and hypocritical." The title of my article, given by *The Oregonian*, was "Pacifism 2001: What is it?" An illustration loomed large in the middle of the page: a dove with an olive branch in its beak, head bowed by the weight of sand pouring out of an hourglass suggested that time was running out on peace.

In the days following the publication of my article, *The Oregonian* ran several letters that expressed the authors' consternation and dismay that anyone would even think of suggesting a nonviolent resolution to the current crisis.

Although there were no letters printed in support of my editorial, I received a flood of phone calls to my home and to the Oregon Peace Institute, where I work, expressing support and appreciation. One person drove 45 minutes to visit OPI and to speak with me and another brought tears to my eyes in commending me for my courage in making my unpopular view so public. I was deeply moved by all these people—friends as well as strangers—who were so quick to offer support and encouragement.

Although at first I was dismayed that there was not a stronger voice for peace in the press, I was very pleased that *The Oregonian* even published my editorial at all, since it was receiving over 1,000 letters a week at that point. I was elated to have gotten out the message about how the media and politicians are feeding us false dichotomies—between good and evil, justice and injustice and terrorism and civilization. I echoed SGI President Ikeda's message that killing is not the answer, and that the solution to the problem of terrorism lies in dialogue and learning the lessons of nonviolent conflict resolution.

It is only natural that very few people understand peaceful resolution of conflict or its importance, since it has never been a mainstream concept. Shortly after Sept. 11, I was talking to a group of young adults and their teachers about conflict resolution. Later, one of the teachers came by OPI to explain how difficult it is for him to help the students understand the concepts I was talking about in relation to the current crisis. He pointed out that not only did the students' parents espouse the mainstream belief in military action, but that the media was only serving to reinforce this belief.

This helped me realize that publishing an editorial such as mine was something akin to spreading an understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. It may have been the first time that many Oregonians heard a pacifist's view. The fact that my article could even find its way into print and run alongside a major columnist gave pacifism credibility.

Being criticized in the press was an honor. It was a minor persecution befalling a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra. I was proud to be able to raise my voice for peace. I know that my deceased father, an idealist and a pacifist, as well as President Ikeda, would be proud of me.

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