

SEIZE *the Day*

SPECIAL YOUTH
PULLOUT SECTION

SOKA SPIRIT FOR A SOKA FAMILY



Sara Curley,
Berkeley, Calif.

I can say with confidence that I can create anything in my life thanks to my practice.

It used to be that when I would argue with my little sister, she would rebel by saying, "I don't want to go to any meetings." But at some point, to my shock, she started saying things that sounded like comments from Nichiren Shoshu members or other SGI critics, such as, "You all worship SGI President Ikeda." I found out that my sister had heard similar comments from my aunt, who used to be an SGI member as well. After my aunt left the SGI, she maintained a Gohonzon room in her home, until at some point I walked in and saw the room had turned into a walk-in closet.

One day, while watching television with my sister, my aunt suddenly said, "I like watching Oprah because it's like Buddhist philosophy." My sister asked her why she would care. My aunt went on to say that she still chants from time to time, but doesn't practice with the organization because she is wary of any religious organization with a leader at the top. My sister then questioned her about the priests and some of the questionable actions they have taken. At some point in the conversation, my aunt said she wished there were meetings she could attend, to which my sister replied, "There are meetings here."

While it's easy for my sister to make comments like, "President Ikeda and the SGI are bad," I hope that through watching the actions of my aunt, my sister could feel that her comment is not true and realize the greatness of President Ikeda and our organization.

Sometimes we may hear people say that they want to do whatever they can to protect their mentor, President Ikeda. We might not understand what they mean and we may think it sounds weird. A few times I've said to myself: "Actually, I do know how she feels but it doesn't sound politically correct. I wish she wouldn't say that in front of guests." However, since I've been a member of the stu-

dent division at the University of California, Berkeley, I've come to feel that the honest confidence with which some members express appreciation toward President Ikeda is admirable. And when I think of those people, I realize they have many things in their lives they can be proud of.

Hearing of my sister's conversation with my aunt made me think again about how I treat my sister. Sometimes she makes negative comments about the SGI that I can't help but respond to and it's hard to do that without getting into a fight. But I'm trying to put into practice President Ikeda's guidance to members whose family members don't practice:

"Developing a state of life where you have the capacity to understand and appreciate the feelings of your parents and family, instead of getting into arguments with them, to feel a sense of gratitude for all that your parents have done for you, and to be able to genuinely treasure and care for them—this is proof of one's faith. Nothing could be more futile than quarreling with one's family over faith...your practice will lead to the happiness of those around you. That is what our practice is all about" (*The Joy of Living*, p. 105).

Even if my sister disagrees with me, I want to develop more respect for her and have the attitude that, although she does not practice Buddhism now, I'll be patient and practice harder for both of us. Sometimes, even if your family members are inactive SGI members, it can feel like you're practicing all by yourself. But I'm determined to stay with the SGI and President Ikeda no matter what. I can say with confidence that I can create anything in my life thanks to my practice. I hope my sister can one day see that, too. ☉

SEIZE *the Day*
is moving!

Look for *Seize the Day* in every
2nd and 4th week of the World Tribune.



FINDING MEANING *in the Loss of A Loved One*

In the following dialogue, four young women, Chelsea Honderich, Sandra Nakasone and Kim Butler-Thomas of Washington, D.C. Region, and Keli McHale of Virginia-Carolina Region, share their personal experiences on how they used their Buddhist practice to find meaning from the death of a parent during their youth.

Keli was 2 years old when her father died in a car accident, Sandra was 16 when her father committed suicide and Kim was 30 when her father died of a sudden heart attack. Chelsea was 24 when her mother

died from brain cancer.

Along with using their practice, they were able to find other support they needed in overcoming their grief such as counseling and having dialogue with family and friends.

Chelsea speaks on behalf of the group: "Through our friendship and sharing our personal experiences, we learned that each of us shared a bond through the loss of a parent. We were able to

(*Loved One...* continued on Page B)

Dr. Anthony Butler



(L) Kim Butler-Thomas at 4 years old with her father, Dr. Anthony Butler, in Okinawa. (R) Kim on her wedding day with her father.

(“Loved One...” continued from Page A)

help each other better cope with the mourning process and deepen our faith and understanding of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

“In holding dialogues about our parent’s death, there were several ‘Ah ha moments’ among us all! We continue to have many realizations that reaffirm that grief, like life, is a process, and our faith and connection to SGI President Ikeda are the engines that propel us forward, helping us give meaning to our loss.”

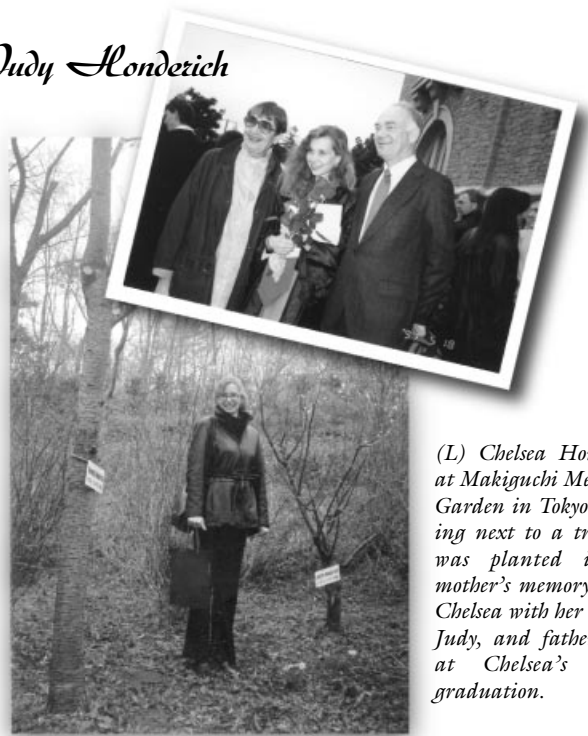
Part one of the dialogue appears here.

Kim: Although it’s only been a year and a half since my father, Dr. Anthony Butler, died, I can really feel the importance of giving meaning to the loss of my parent. When my father died, he and I had reached a point where we were beginning to understand and respect each other. He saw me not only as his daughter, but also as an individual who has her own life and dreams. In the past, my dad and I struggled with the issue of respect. I felt he did not respect me as a person and I didn’t respect him. But I had just reached another turning point in my relationship with my father. I began to understand more about who he was and what he had been through. Then he died of a sudden heart attack during a family vacation on Nov. 26, 1999, at age 52.

Because it was so unexpected, I often struggled with feelings of regret. There were many conversations I wished I’d had with him. I expected to grow old with him and I imagined he’d be there for the birth of my first child or to see my first house. I regretted the times that—because of my resentment toward him—I wished my dad out of my life. Through my Buddhist practice, therapy and talking with close friends and family, I now realize that in the end, we did have a good relationship and were able to start spending more time together. I began to enjoy being around him and I’m thankful we didn’t end on a sour note. Finally, I discovered that although we were different, in some ways, we were alike. I was able to develop into who I am through my relationship with my dad.

Yes, the biggest benefit and most important lesson learned from my dad’s passing is how important it is that we live life to the fullest.

Judy Honderich



(L) Chelsea Honderich at Makiguchi Memorial Garden in Tokyo standing next to a tree that was planted in her mother’s memory. (Top) Chelsea with her mother, Judy, and father, Ken, at Chelsea’s college graduation.

Chelsea: It sounds like you have come to truly appreciate the times that you did spend with your father.

Kim: Yes, the biggest benefit and most important lesson learned from my dad’s passing is how important it is that we live life to the fullest. It became clear to my whole family just how profoundly he was able to touch other people’s lives, no matter how brief the encounter. We received so many letters, cards and calls from people all over—some of which we didn’t even know—to express how glad and fortunate they were to have known him. More than 600 people attended my father’s memorial service. The service was not at all somber; it was a joyous celebration of his life. I don’t think he realized how profoundly he touched people. It reminds me of a quote from SGI President Ikeda: “All of us die eventually. The crucial thing is how we have lived. It is important to live as long as we can, but length is not the measure of a good life. What matters most is what we have done with our lives. That is what determines whether it has been a good life or not” (March 16, *World Tribune*, p. 4). Although my father’s life was relatively short, he accomplished a lot and I feel he really did enjoy his life.

His death is still a painful and personal experience for me. For a while, I felt numb. Other times I couldn’t understand why it was so hard for me to move forward. In our society it seems as though, since death is a natural part of life, we’re supposed to “get over it.” Have you guys felt this way?

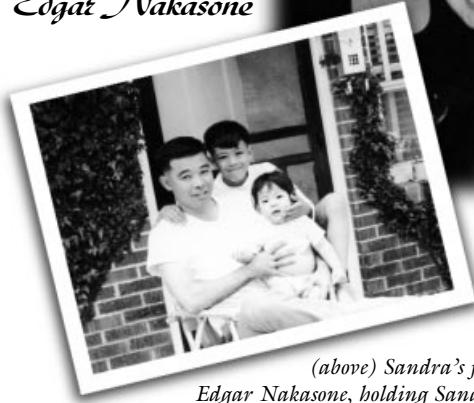
Chelsea: Definitely. This July 6 marks seven years since my mother, Judy Honderich, passed away. For years after she died, I tried to be strong, take care of others and keep myself busy, pursuing my master’s degree at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, while working and doing SGI activities. Yet, in being so busy, I was avoiding my true feelings of anger, despair and sadness, thus building a very shaky foundation. Only recently have I begun to tear down the wall between my emotions and myself.

The other day, as I shared with a trusted friend how much I’ve strug-

Edgar Nakasone



Sandra Nakasone (r) with JHU classmate, Terry Britton (l).



(above) Sandra's father, Edgar Nakasone, holding Sandra. Behind Sandra is her brother, Norman.

gled because I felt I had to just "get over the loss of my mom," it felt so good to hear her say, "Why would you want to?" She encouraged me to integrate my mother into my life. Rather than denying her as an integral part of my life, she encouraged me to take my mom with me into all of my relationships. This really struck a chord in my heart.

Kim: What do you think helped you start breaking down those walls further?

Chelsea: At the beginning of last year, I chanted to break through my internal struggles to show victory in all aspects of my life for kosen-rufu. I wanted to win as President Ikeda's disciple and my mother's daughter. Since then, my life has opened so much. I've begun to take better care of myself. The following guidance from President Ikeda has inspired me: "All of these seemingly adverse situations are exactly the right nourishment you need to grow even stronger. You must courageously spur yourselves on, reminding yourselves that the deeper the pain and grief, the greater the happiness that awaits you. Have the determination to become pillars of support for your family. Buddhism teaches this way of life" (*Discussions on Youth*, vol. 1, pp. 32-33).

Kim: My father's death was also sudden and traumatic for my family. How do you change poison into medicine with a tragic way of dying like suicide?

Sandra: It has been 16 years since the death of my father, Edgar Nakasone. Only now am I truly beginning to heal and come to terms with it. This tragic event in my life enabled me to take faith in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Through my mother's prayers and a visit by a caring women's chapter leader, Mrs. Helen Ishigaki, I was encouraged to participate in SGI youth activities. This led me to build friendships among other youth members and to learn about President Ikeda.

It was through my prayers that I was able to meet a compassionate graduate school professor who helped me recognize important issues in my life.

I wanted to win as President Ikeda's disciple and my mother's daughter. Since then, my life has opened so much.



(above) Keli (on the right) with a friend. (upper right) Keli as a young girl. (left photo) Keli's father, Michael Thomas McHale.

Michael Thomas McHale

He suggested that in order for me to become a great agent of change, I needed to break through my deep-seated suffering as a survivor of suicide, an adult child of an alcoholic and a life lacking in personal discipline. Now, I am able to lift the rug and deal with the stuff that was once swept under it. My family has been supportive of my healing process and I am grateful that they have been willing to answer questions about my past. Through e-mails and phone calls, we are able to learn from each other's perspectives of our once dysfunctional family life and my father's death.

Keli: That has been my experience as well. My father, Michael Thomas McHale passed away in a car accident on March 16 when I was 2 years old. I really didn't know my father other than from looking at his pictures and hearing stories about him from my mother. I used to wonder what my father's voice might sound like or what he would say to me if I could see him for even 10 minutes. I asked myself what I was supposed to understand and learn from his death.

For years I did not feel a connection to him. Then one day when I was 23 and struggling in school, I went to his grave for the first time alone and told him my situation and future dreams. I couldn't comprehend exactly why so many emotions came over me at the time. I cried and cried, but I felt so good.

Kim: It sounds like grieving is a process that is different for each of us. That is why it's important we acknowledge our true feelings.

In the June 8 issue of Seize the Day, this dialogue will conclude with in-depth discussion on how the loss of a loved one enabled each of the young women to strengthen their faith in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. As Sandra states, "I came to feel in my darkest moments that my SGI friends and President Ikeda understood what I was going through. This has given me hope to carry on with renewed determination and to return to having faith in the Gohonzon."

Trailblazers!



by **George Artope**
Los Angeles Region
Student Division
Leader

Let's Explode Creatively

The student division is setting the pace for the future in terms of human relationships, communications and concept development. Each individual's ideas and thought processes are unique simply by the fact that if you ask a group of students to draw or describe the word "creativity," each person will give you a different response. Being creative doesn't just mean thinking outside the box, and it's not a term that only pertains to artists. To me, being creative means exploding your heart's capacity at any given moment. It means throwing out the ideas originating from human impulses. It means singing that tune the way you think it should be sung. Now that's creative.

As a student division member and a person born into the practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, I have learned that the more creative we become, the more we are able to inspire others. What better atmosphere to explode creatively than in college! The work-

ings of the universe are still very new to college students. And as our campus groups become larger and students become smarter, the formal aspects of standard SGI meetings may not be as attractive as they once were for our generation. Many students today can run circles around the standard gongyo, explanation, dialogue presentation, experience and final words meeting format with their intellect and spend forever analyzing what was said before they begin practicing. I don't mean to dismiss our heartfelt and sincere explanations, but I think what will inspire students the most is our creative hearts.

The student division members in Southern California are beginning to stretch their creative muscle in terms of student-sponsored Buddhist meetings. In our first ever College Explosion meeting, held on April 28, 2001—with a combined effort of more than eight colleges and university campus clubs—we have challenged the standard meeting formats, not just so we can say, "Look, we came up with a different way," but to expand and come up with new ways of attracting bright and intelligent college students. We came up with one creative idea on top of another, until we were ready to explode on April 28.

I also feel that we can be creative in our campus clubs. As a Value Creation Society campus club president at the University of Southern California for two years, I know it can be an obstacle just getting everyone together at the same time. In this case, it may be creative and

appropriate to just have a conference call with all the students in your club to touch base and stimulate more creative ideas. Furthermore, we can't make all of our campus meetings because we have to study.

Well, how about making your meeting a study meeting and have someone bring a Buddhist article to study during a coffee break? Sometimes, social events are more effective in getting students' creative hearts involved. Go bowling, running, eating or even throw a huge campus party together.

Establishing heart-to-heart connections with each other is just as important as the intellectual understanding of our practice. Maybe these are not the most creative ideas, but you get my point.

So how can you be creative? Since your creative impulse is as unique as mine, I can't answer that question for you. Being creative is not easy either. Sometimes our creativity doesn't make sense to others, so we have to make sure that everyone will be able to understand our point without getting lost. I find that a good way to stimulate creative ideas is to be involved in an array of diverse activities in life, both educational and cultural. An amazing musician and fellow SGI-USA member, Miguel Atwood-Ferguson, enlightened me to something once. I believe it will also hold true in your creative efforts: "As long as it comes from the heart, it will be the right one." ●

Until My Soul Sleeps

*My soul can't sleep
It is awake.*

*Lively flowing river,
lovely breeze over the forest,
quietly shining sunlight,
those are all my breaths.*

*Soul livens up when the world closes its
eyes,
and the soul gets out of its tired body.
Finally, my soul opens its eyes and looks
around.*

*With these twinkling, esteemed stars,
with this sleepy, silver moon,
I want to sing the song of love,
I want to talk to them with my whole
heart.*

*My soul is limited by nothing.
A thousand miles of distance,
uncountable time,
cannot be the obstacles.
It exists in the place
where valuable thoughts open their eyes.*

*Dead bodies are sleeping.
Souls open their eyes and stand up
and fly to the place where their thoughts
dwell.*

*Moving here and there,
giving a dead nature a light, a breath
and a life.*

*I will sing the song of my love,
singing of my love song forever,
I will sing until the angry volcano is
cooled down,
holding back its last breath on its cold
heart.*

*I will comfort the volcano, the sky and
the river.*

*For the sleeping souls
I will sail on the motherly ocean,
and I will wait for you in the undiscovered
island.
Healing your pains gently,
touching your tentative hearts heavenly,
I will open your closed eyes, I will love you.*

By Junghee Seo

*I hear the voice that I cannot recognize.
Where did the voice come from?
Whose voice was it?
Was it the echoes from the mystic cave?
Was it jewels on the galaxy laughing?
Was it the ringing of a thoughtful bell?
or was it those fatigued souls whimpering?*

*A season will be coming.
For the suffering souls, for the sake of
their rest.
Eyes of compassion will open widely on
the branches of wise trees.
Do not run away if I would not be there
to hold you,
do not hide behind the darkness even I
would be speechless there with you.
You will be able to see the delight from
my island, from my sky, and from my
river.
Only wide, open-minded souls, only
thoughtful souls' eyes
will see providence of the sky and mercy
of the earth.* ●