

SPECIAL YOUTH
PULLOUT SECTION

SEIZE the Day

SGI-USA Family Youth Festivals – Getting Focused

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By James Herrmann, SGI-USA Youth Leader

‘Let’s keep in mind that all these exciting activities are a vehicle for each of us to realize our true potential!’

Hello Everyone,

Thank you very much for all of your efforts and support of our recent May Commemorative Contribution Campaign. As we enter the summer months, members in every SGI-USA zone are enthusiastically preparing for their upcoming SGI-USA Family Youth Festival. This year, SGI-USA will hold 26 such festivals throughout the United States. The focus of our youth activities throughout the summer and fall will be to achieve absolute victory in these festivals and to successfully hold seven dynamic youth conferences at the Florida Nature and Culture Center.

With 26 culture festivals and seven FNCC conferences, 2001 will undoubtedly be one of the most challenging and rewarding years in our organization’s recent history.

What makes 2001 significant is that we have sounded the first bell of the second set of Seven Bells. This time signifies the beginning of a new era, a time in which the youth of America take full responsibility for the propagation of Buddhism in our country.

In his message for May 3, Soka Gakkai Day, SGI President Ikeda states, “The unprecedented spread of the Daishonin’s Buddhism that we see in each region around the world today started from the pioneering efforts of devoted individuals” (May 18 *World Tribune*, p. 11).

SGI-USA is no exception. In fact, many of our pioneers who spread this Buddhism in America did so in an unfamiliar culture

and with a severe language barrier. Despite these setbacks, they were able to courageously lead thousands of people to happiness.

Regardless of what position we hold in the organization or what role we play in this summer’s events, it is up to each of us to have our own resolve for kosen-rufu. As President Ikeda continues: “It is always individuals with a strong sense of commitment and responsibility who open up the way for kosen-rufu.” Indeed, President Ikeda is a model of commitment to kosen-rufu and we can use these festivals to develop the same commitment ourselves.

To what extent do I take action for others? Do I possess a strong sense of responsibility for kosen-rufu? How much have I challenged myself to do *shakubuku*? These are the questions that we must sincerely and objectively ask ourselves. The answers to these questions will determine our own happiness and the success of our daily lives.

Let’s keep in mind that all these exciting activities are a vehicle for each of us to realize our true potential. They enable us to renew our resolve to spread this Buddhism throughout America and strengthen our seeking spirit toward the mentor-disciple relationship.

In President Ikeda’s May 3 message, he also states: “Together with all of you, I renew my pledge to spread the ‘Buddhism of human revolution’ around the globe. The Daishonin states, ‘I entrust you with the propagation of Buddhism in your province’ (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1117). In light of these words, we each have a unique and noble mission that has been entrusted to us by the Daishonin to ensure the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law in our respective communities and regions. In the Daishonin’s Buddhism, those who are aware of their profound mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth are precious beyond measure.”

Developing heightened awareness of our profound mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth is the purpose of all our activities. When we are united in purpose, when we are each striving to do our human revolution and are actively challenging ourselves to do *shakubuku*, a brilliant new era will emerge in America. The time has come! Now is our chance! Let’s unite and press forward courageously toward a year of unprecedented victories. ☉



FINDING MEANING in the Loss of A Loved One

The following dialogue is part two of a discussion among Chelsea Honderich, Sandra Nakasone, Kim Butler-Thomas and Keli McHale on how they used their Buddhist practice to find meaning from the death of a parent. Part one appeared in the May 18 issue of *Seize the Day*.

Kim: Keli, why do you think visiting your father’s grave affected you so much?

Keli: When I spoke to my dad, I realized that I did-

n’t know or believe in myself. I felt detached from my father, and thus, from myself as well. It wasn’t until the young women’s conference last year at the Florida Nature and Culture Center that all my experiences would become clear to me. I realized I didn’t believe in my own Buddha nature and this was blocking my understanding of the mentor-disciple relationship. Now I have new convictions and believe in my own life and mission as SGI President Ikeda’s disciple. I

(“Loved One...” continued on Page B)

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

feel my father lives on through me and I am determined to respond to him. As President Ikeda states: “The deceased live on in our convictions. Each day we are living together with President Makiguchi and President Toda. I want to engrave in my heart this teaching of the Daishonin that battling evil and injustice is the ultimate offering we can make for the eternal happiness of the deceased” (April Living Buddhism, p. 30).



Keli McHale

Kim: That reminds me of a quote from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* that helped me deal with my feelings of regret at the time of my father’s death, “When your beloved deceased father hears the sound of your voice chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, he will delight in his Buddhahood” (p. 1066).

Chelsea: On this point President Ikeda explains: “Buddhism expounds the oneness of life and death, and the oneness of parent and child. So if those family members who are still alive are happy, those who have died will move on a course of happiness, too” (March 16 *World Tribune*, p. 5). By continuing to seek to understand the loss of my mother, I am discovering my true self. I understand that it is important for me to become happy. Then my mom will definitely become happy. This awareness is refreshing. Even more exciting to me is the fact that I can chant to be reborn with her close by me.



Kim Butler

Kim: Sandra, you also mentioned that your father’s death has brought you closer to President Ikeda. I also had this experience at the young women’s conference last year, too.

There, I penned a poem on Father’s Day entitled “My Father, My Mentor.” I was inspired to write it because I came to appreciate my dad as the person who introduced the Daishonin’s Buddhism to me and taught me how to practice. This led to my appreciation of President Ikeda who taught me how to live.

Sandra: That’s right. If it hadn’t been for my father’s tragic death, I wouldn’t have met the women’s leaders who led me to President Ikeda. Ten years after my father died, I suffered a year-long suicidal depression. Through that experience, 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, to return to having faith in the Gohonzon and to strengthen and expand my life. President Ikeda says: “That is why Buddhism teaches that we must elevate our lives to the state of Buddhahood while we are alive. We must do our utmost to cultivate and enrich our lives as human beings. That is the purpose of our Buddhist practice. Nothing is more important in life than doing our human revolution. And the younger you are, the easier it is to accomplish” (Oct. 13, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 5).

Chelsea: I, too, feel my mother helped me become closer to President Ikeda through her illness and subsequent death. After she died, President Ikeda planted a plum blossom tree in memory of my mother—who also practiced this Buddhism—and a cherry blossom tree in dedication to my father at the Makiguchi Memorial Garden in Hachioji, Tokyo. I was so moved by his gesture and truly felt that he knows how to give people

hope. I knew then that I would always strive to learn how to live my life to the fullest from President Ikeda.

Kim: President Ikeda has said that the 21st century will be the grand stage for the youth. As more people join our movement for the happiness of humanity, such experiences will be our jewels with which to encourage others. The experience of dealing with my father’s death, as well as coping with my own illness and subsequent paralyzing depression, has enabled me to have more compassion when encouraging other young women who are facing the same obstacles. Because of my experience, I am determined to live my life to the fullest and respond to President Ikeda and to my father, showing his legacy through my life. To show my appreciation as a daughter and a disciple, I want to take care of my health and fulfill my mission. I am determined to become happy, healthy and live a long life!

Chelsea: That’s a wonderful determination! I think that is such an important point. In our society today, when something negative happens our first response is “Why me?” or “I must have done something terrible for this to happen.” Although it’s tough at times, I feel a sense of mission because of my mother’s loss. I now understand the hearts of others suffering a loss and I am better able to support them.

Sandra: It truly is about having a mission. President Ikeda writes: “Buddhism teaches the concept of deliberately choosing our circumstances. This is where practitioners of the Mystic



Sandra Nakasone

Law voluntarily choose to be born into painful situations, so that they might demonstrate the power of Buddhism to others through their struggles and their subsequent triumph. This is the way of life of a bodhisattva” (March 16 *World Tribune*, p. 4). When I read this, I realized I chose these

life struggles as my mission to exemplify the validity of the Lotus Sutra and the power of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. I’ve also developed greater empathy and compassion for others sharing similar experiences.



Chelsea Slonderich

Chelsea: I think it’s no coincidence that we have been through the experiences we have and are having breakthroughs at this time. In *Discussions on Youth*, President Ikeda says: “Those who endure many hardships in youth have already scaled a high mountain in life, well ahead of others. Such people will be the leaders of the twenty-first century” (vol. 1, p. 34). On May 3, 2001, President Ikeda called on the SGI youth to sound the second set of seven bells, launching a new departure for all humanity into a century of peace, a century of life. To do so, he has encouraged us to go back to the fundamental question of understanding life and death.

Sandra: Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism teaches that we should “learn first about death then about other things” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1404). This philosophy will be the key in helping to create a century in which people are placed first and foremost, just as understanding death and its role in life is the key to leading a truly happy and fulfilled existence. I am so grateful and honored to have this heartfelt friendship with all of you! Let’s strike seven bells and open a new page in the history of our lives for world peace and the happiness of all humanity! ☸

LEARNING TO NEVER GIVE UP!



Jesse Makowski Dayton, Ohio

'I'm glad that I didn't run away from those challenges.'

My name is Jesse Makowski. I'm 12 years old and in the sixth grade.

The year 2001 began with me introducing the Victory Over Violence video, *Quest for Peace* to my social studies teacher and school principal. All the students in the sixth grade at my school watched the video and had discussions afterward.

In March and April, I had major challenges in my life. Since I'm in middle school now, I participate in SGI-USA youth activities like music corps. As part of my school activities, I belong to the choir and student council and I practice Kendo (Japanese fencing) at a local dojo. I was asked to be the emcee for our March 16 commemorative district meeting. It was my first time being emcee, but I thought I did well. A few days before my school camping trip in April, I had a high fever and ear infection. On the night I came back from the camp, I stayed overnight at my friend's home so that we could leave at 4:30 the next morning for Cleveland for a

Kendo tournament. The result of the tournament was a disaster. Toward the end, I was feeling better because I realized that I challenged myself to fight with much bigger teenagers and I did not run away.

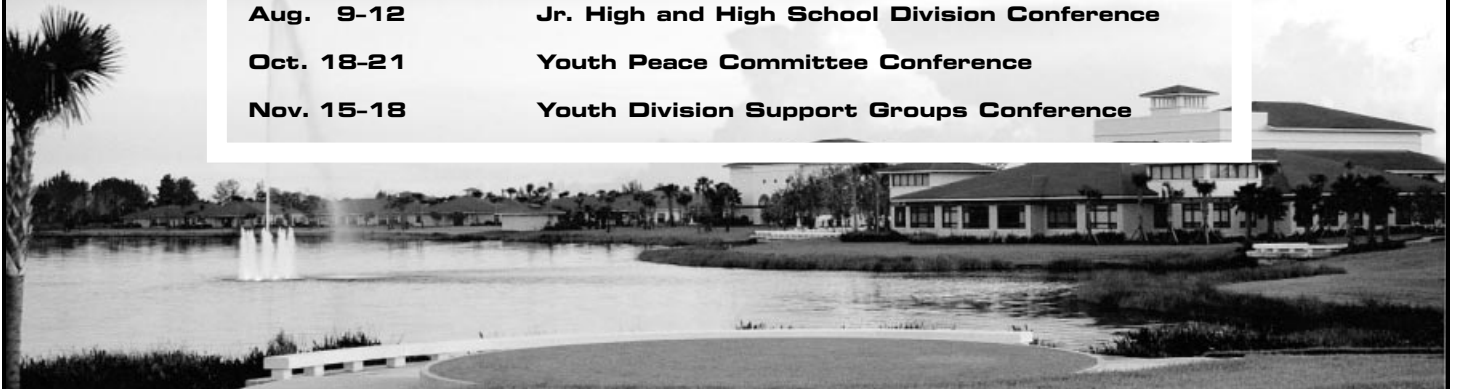
By the time we came home from Cleveland, it was already past two in the morning. That same day, I took the SGI-USA entrance exam. I tried to study between homework and Kendo matches. It was not easy to concentrate and go through all the questions for the exam, but I took it anyway. My mother told me that passing the test is great, but accepting the challenge is the most important thing. I'm glad that I didn't run away from those challenges. A few days later, I was told that I passed the exam.

I met SGI President Ikeda in Germany when I was a baby. I like his books and I like to study his guidance so that I will understand his heart. I'm chanting to welcome him to the United States soon, hopefully to Ohio. ☺

Check Out

Upcoming Florida Nature and Culture Center Youth Conferences!

July 5-8	Young Men's Conference
July 12-15	Young Women's Conference
July 19-22	Youth Performing Groups Conference
Aug. 2-5	Student Division Conference
Aug. 9-12	Jr. High and High School Division Conference
Oct. 18-21	Youth Peace Committee Conference
Nov. 15-18	Youth Division Support Groups Conference





By Shan Serafin,
SGI-USA Jr. High School Leader

Y'all Show Me the Way

Right now graduation is in the air. The feeling evokes a sense of awe in me, an awe of the power of relationships. Recently, I got a letter from a former student of mine, a young girl I used to teach in high school. Way back at the end of one school year I was signing yearbooks—hers was one of them—and in writing to her I used SGI President Ikeda's wisdom and wrote something praising her heart. Whatever I wrote apparently stuck with her. Her recent letter to

me—a thank you note—described how these words stayed with her to this day.

In *The Way of Youth*, President Ikeda states, "In Japanese, we write the word for 'human being' with the characters meaning 'person' and 'between,' expressing the idea that human beings are complete only in relationship to other people" (p. 33).

The young woman's letter had an interesting effect on me. I began to think of all the times, the many, many times, something that someone has done has stuck with me. In the spirit of the graduation season, I'd like to mention a few of these people, who, probably having no idea that they did, inspired me to become a better man simply through an action (an incomplete list, not in any order, not representative).

To my buddy Tom, a firefighter, saving lives and saving me from chaos once, driving 400 miles just to pick me up, turn around and drive us 400 miles back. To Steve, Big Daddy Jr., who, bottom line, cares for his members. To the woman at the park whose name I'll never know, who years back when I was a whirling pre-pubescent offered me a heartfelt conversation when I thought I couldn't talk to anyone. To the top

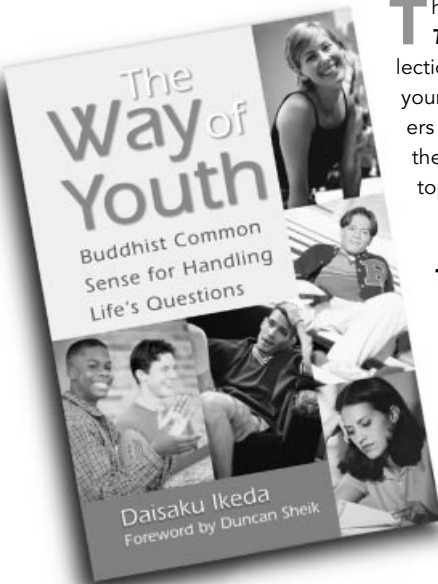
student at my high school, whose weekly progress was my weekly inspiration. To my current circle of co-leaders, whom I think of whenever I'm too tired to act. To Danny, who is like a walking, talking fountain of youth. To Brian, who chants with me in the morning and shows

Every day, the people in my life offer concrete examples of how to be a good human.

me a seeking spirit in action. To Jomo, who shows me that education is daily life, who learns everyday from everybody. To Sibyl, who fights harder than most anyone I know. To Cory, who practices what he preaches, so to speak, giving a young fella golden opportunities. To Chuck and Masao who showed me how to be strict with myself when it comes to the world's most precious commodity, young folk. To Gandhi, whose life was his message. To President Ikeda, whose major accomplishments move me and live with me, but whose basic gestures on the memorable occasions I've met him, serve as my song to sing when I'm truly challenged. To my heroes, my father, who is a champion of optimism, and my mother. Mom, I owe my faith to you.

Every day, the people in my life offer concrete examples of how to be a good human. Maybe I can somewhat repay you by striving to be one. ●

The Way of Youth



The following is an excerpt from the hit book *The Way of Youth*, a universally appealing collection of some of SGI President Ikeda's words to young people. His insight reaches beyond all barriers of race, creed, culture and gender and gets to the heart of youth issues. Each one of over eighty topics is covered in a questions/answer format.

Advising Friends, p. 35

The only way you can influence your peers is to establish genuine friendships with them one by one. Listen attentively to what they have to say, but also clearly tell them when their ideas are wrong and admonish them not to ruin their lives through their actions. Develop the type of friendship in which you can say what needs to be said.

To read more or to find words of wisdom to other questions you may have asked yourself, *The Way of Youth* can be purchased from your favorite online or neighborhood bookstore.

MATERIAL REQUEST!

SEND IN YOUR STUFF

Our youth publication is only as strong as what you bring us. Poems, Articles, Pictures, Stories, Commentaries, ...whatever you got, get it to us.

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