

SPECIAL YOUTH
PULLOUT SECTION

SEIZE The Day

THE GREENSBORO SIT-INS: How Four Young Men Decide To Make a Difference



By Willie Mack
Los Angeles

Youth, be courageous! Do not fear evil people! Boldly speak out! Cause your voice of conviction to resound like a thunderclap that awakens all living beings! Shake up society, which has grown stagnant, and revitalize the world!

—SGI President Ikeda (May 25 *World Tribune*, p. 5).

The following is part one of a two-part essay.

In 1960—the same year SGI President Ikeda launched the worldwide kosen-rufu movement beginning with America—four black college students met in a dorm room at North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro, N.C., to discuss politics, life and philosophy. They debated the politics of the South and the hypocrisy of the community, religious leaders and government. They were young idealists that believed that they had the power to make a change in the world. Each of these four men shared dreams of overcoming the racism rampant in America. They had grown up with segregation, humiliation and injustice as everyday occurrences. The idea of equality was a dream they could only discuss amongst themselves.

Four guys met, planned, and went into action. It's just that simple.

—Franklin McCain

President Ikeda states, “Those who have something they truly believe in are fearless” (May 25 *World Tribune*, p. 6). Buddhism teaches us to strive to discover our mission. Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda said that youth should have big dreams, because in the course of our lives we will only accomplish a small fraction of what we set out to do. The bigger our dreams, the more we will accomplish.

Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair Jr., David Richmond and Joseph McNeil were college freshmen who decided that they could not wait any longer for change. One Sunday night, Joseph McNeil said: “It’s time that we take some action now. We’ve been getting together, and we’ve been, up to this point, still like most people we’ve talked about for the past few weeks or so—that is, people who talk a lot but, in fact, make very little action” (*My Soul is Rested*, by Howell Raines, p. 75).

These young students decided to use nonviolent, direct action as their tool for ending segregation in Greensboro. They had studied about Mahatma Gandhi in school and decided that nonviolence was the way to go. At that point, the Montgomery Bus

Boycott and the activities of Martin Luther King Jr. were only local issues. Their desire to take on this task came from their own thinking and planning.

The next morning, Feb. 1, 1960, the four young men went to Woolworth’s, a major shopping center in downtown Greensboro. Woolworth’s had a policy of not discriminating against shopping customers, but would only allow whites to eat at their restaurant. Blacks had to go down to the basement where they would be served.

“Once getting there...we did make purchases of school supplies and took the patience and time to get receipts for our purchases, and Joseph and myself [McCain] went over to the counter and asked to be served coffee and doughnuts. As anticipated, the reply was, ‘I’m sorry, we don’t serve you here.’ And of course we said, ‘We just beg to disagree with you. We’ve in fact already been served; you’ve served us already and that’s just not quite true...We wonder why you’d invite us in to serve us at one counter and deny service at another. If this is a private club or private concern, then we believe you ought to sell membership cards and sell only to persons who have a membership card. If we don’t have a card, then we’d know pretty well that we shouldn’t come in or even attempt to come in” (p. 76).

At this point, there was a crowd forming and the police were there. The police were unable to do anything because the students had not broken any laws. They were peacefully sitting in a restaurant at a store where they had made purchases. These students had taken a step that no one in Greensboro had taken before. They were scared, but they had conviction and belief in their cause. They weren’t looking for attention; they were only trying to free themselves from the restriction of segregation and racism.

Surprisingly, they faced mixed reactions from other customers at the restaurant. Some older white women walked past them and actually commended them for their efforts. However, others—including a middle-aged black dishwasher—said, “That’s why we can’t get anyplace today, because of people like you, rabble-rousers, troublemakers” (p. 77).

These students proved that reluctance to take on injustice only strengthened its grip. They felt that standing up with courage, conviction and dedication is the only way to freedom. ●

Look for part two of this essay in the July 27 issue of Seize the Day.

The Teacher and the Student

By Ashley McKenzie,
Tustin, Calif.

The following article is an essay written by Ashley for her English class, sharing the impact her teachers had on developing her passion for learning during her four years of high school.



Mentor and Disciple

I just graduated from Tustin High School. Based on my four years there, I have been able to grasp the purpose of education. I have been with the best of teachers and the worst of teachers, and I know the difference between a fulfilling education and an unfulfilling one. I have come to realize that the student-teacher relationship, and the student's will to learn, are the basis of a well-rounded education. I have gone from ignorant and unhappy to knowledgeable and enlightened.

During my freshman year, I was completely ignorant of the purpose of learning and I didn't care to know. I was immature and blind to the world around me. When sophomore year came around, my honors English teacher inspired me to think "outside the box." She was very open and personal with us, and before I knew it, a true friendship had grown between her and the students.

Her outgoing personality and daring methods of teaching won her respect from the students. It made me want to meet her expectations and make her proud of me. She talked to us as a teacher and a friend. If a student was having problems with school, home or life in general, she would make a point to personally talk with that student after class. The relationship she built with students encouraged us to be comfortable with learning something new and working diligently.

I received my first perfect score on an essay in her class. She later took me aside and told me that through my essay, she learned something about the book we were reading that she had never realized before. It was from that conversation that I realized the importance of a healthy and encouraging student-teacher relationship in every classroom. This relationship embodies learning from the teacher, as well as the teacher learning something from the student. This kind of dedicated teacher is someone that opens up her heart to bring down the barriers of the fear of knowledge and the narrow borders of what a student is supposed to learn.

That year was just the beginning of my growth. My junior honors English class is where I discovered my will to learn. The class curriculum had the requirements of reading works from Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman and many others. It was a combination of reading the

works of these three men and my English teacher that sparked my passion for learning.

The whole course, it seemed, was a philosophy class. The philosophies that we explored—transcendentalism, romanticism, deism, naturalism and realism—were intriguing to me. I felt that by reading about these philosophies, I got a chance to step into and experience different periods of history. My teacher had the ability to create a strong, open relationship with the class. He seemed to take whatever it was that we were learning and apply it to our own lives. I gained a global view, opening my eyes for the first time to the world around me. Because of this awakening, I wanted to learn as much as I could and advance to my fullest potential.

There must be a spark to light the fire of passion that will burn in each student. This is something that is vital to our education. To find this spark, I believe, we must break down the walls of narrow learning—the set curriculum—and build better relationships between the teacher and the student. We must form a higher standard of teaching and learning that involves humanism. We must have more of an interactive learning environment where

students see the importance of the subject at hand in relationship to our lives.

At the same time, the student should find what they love, their passion, and work toward fulfilling that passion. We should be inquisitive—always desiring to learn more. We should also be actively involved in our own education, whether it takes place inside or outside of school. The teacher lays out knowledge for us, but it means nothing if we don't take it.

'When sophomore year came around, my honors English teacher inspired me to think "outside the box." She was very open and personal with us and before I knew it, a true friendship had grown between her and the students.'

I would be willing to bet that students centuries ago gained a much more profound education than we do today. They were in a learning environment where all the knowledge came directly from the teacher. The student-teacher ratio was a lot smaller, so we could assume that the relationship between the two played a significant role in the student's education. Because there were none of the modern conveniences students use today, that one-to-one connection meant that much more to the student and to the teacher.

I've gained happiness from learning. That is the true purpose of education. If you find someone who is ignorant of the world around him, he may not be a very happy person. Knowledge gives you a sense of humanity and connection with the world around you. It lets you know your place in this vast universe, and it all begins with the teacher and the student.

This teacher-student relationship relates closely to the mentor-disciple relationship that is the basis of my Buddhist practice. SGI President Ikeda has said, "It is the mentor-disciple relationship...that builds character. Many great scholars, pioneers and leaders of the world have come to note how crucial the mentor-disciple relationship is" (*For Today and Tomorrow*, p. 271).



Fighting on the Side of Justice



The following is an interview on Soka Spirit between SGI-USA Young Women's Leader Wendy DeSouza (left) and Linnea Peery, a district leader in Los Angeles (right).

Wendy DeSouza: What were your first experiences with Soka Spirit?

Linnea Peery: I joined the SGI in 1990, right before Operation C was implemented. High Priest Nikken Abe was making statements that he would basically turn our Gohonzons off if we didn't practice directly with Nichiren Shoshu. That seemed so silly to me, and I figured it would be obvious to other people as well. But I wondered why people had to talk about this issue so much. I felt annoyed whenever I heard "temple", "Nikken" or "evil" at a meeting. I wanted to hear about being happy and creating peace—I couldn't see how the temple issue related to that.

Wendy: Was there an event or experience that inspired you to look further?

Linnea: I was at a meeting where I heard a youth leader share that fighting injustice is the quickest way to enlightenment. Something about the words "quick" and "enlightenment" must have appealed to my fondness for shortcuts. The next day, I began chanting for the victory of the SGI. I immediately experienced a change in my life condition. I felt like I had been in a fog that was beginning to clear. I started to realize that my perspective about my place in the organization and as a Bodhisattva of the Earth was really passive and counter to Buddhism.

Wendy: How so?

Linnea: I had unconsciously been assuming that other people would take care of this situation. These other people would chant about it and make it go away, while the rest of us could just tend to our lives and ride it out. The more I studied and sought to understand the meaning of Soka Spirit, I realized that I had been taking the existence of this great organization for granted. People were trying to destroy it and I was just waiting around! All I'd heard about equality among the practitioners of the Law and viewing this as my organization was finally making a connection in my brain. I *was* other people. If I didn't protect the organization, who would?

Wendy: What kind of action did you take?

Linnea: I didn't know any Nichiren Shoshu members, but I wanted other SGI members to appreciate how much we could learn and develop ourselves through understanding this issue. I continued to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo about it and participated in local Soka Spirit activities that were happening every month. I became the Soka Spirit representative for my district and determined to do a short presentation

every month on the issue, be it through updates, what I had learned at a meeting or personal experiences. It was intimidating, but I felt it was too important to be ignored.

Wendy: How did people respond?

Linnea: A couple of people came up to me and said they hadn't felt strongly about facing the issues surrounding Soka Spirit before, but now they wanted to chant about it. That encouraged me a lot. There were times when I felt like a lot of people didn't see what Soka Spirit had to do with their own lives, or they thought it was negative and didn't want to hear about it. I could certainly relate to those perspectives!

Wendy: How have those perspectives changed for you?

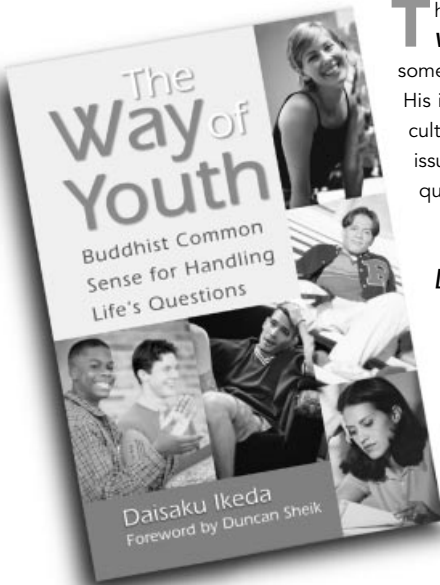
Linnea: For one thing, I started to see what's happening today in a historical context. The history of Buddhism is lined with efforts to block people's ability to practice Buddhism correctly and courageous people standing up to protect it. Nichiren Daishonin endured great persecutions but never stopped speaking out about the superiority of the Lotus Sutra. The first two Soka Gakkai presidents, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, went to jail rather than accept a Shinto object of worship. Those instances may seem somewhat unreal to us because they happened before most of us were born. Actually, the current situation with Nichiren Shoshu is yet another function to keep the propagation of true Buddhism from advancing and we have to be the courageous people who stand up to protect it.

I find it upsetting that the Daishonin's teachings are twisted by those who have a personal agenda, but at the same time, I've come to appreciate it as a great opportunity. This is happening because it's time to take the advancement of kosen-rufu to a new level. Through understanding this issue, we can help people understand Buddhism on a deep level and become the most amazing people in our daily lives.

Wendy: I was talking with a young woman in San Diego who's very active in Soka Spirit activities. She mentioned that while a lot of young men seem to be active, she was having a hard time getting young women involved. When I asked her why, she said that although this is a generalization, young men tend to be passionate about fighting injustice. On the other hand, women seem hesitant about disrupting harmony or "rocking the boat." She felt that young women would get involved based on the idea of protecting people. We talked about the need to approach Soka Spirit at different angles so that we can reach everybody.

Linnea: I think that makes a lot of sense. I know facing conflicts can be a challenge for women because many of us want to be the peacemakers. That's certainly true for me. One thing I've learned from Soka Spirit is that compassion comes in many forms. I like this guidance from SGI President Ikeda where he says: "We have to speak out. With impassioned words, we need to resolutely attack abuses of power that cause people suffering. This is fighting on the side of justice. It is wrong to remain silent when confronted with injustice. Doing so is tantamount to supporting and condoning evil" (*For Today and Tomorrow*, p. 216). ●

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 80 topics is covered in a question-and-answer format.

True Love, p. 41

[I]f you genuinely love someone, then through your relationship with him or her, you can develop into a person whose love extends to all humanity. That sort of relationship strengthens and enriches your inner realm. Ultimately, the relationships you form reflect your own state of life. Only to the extent that you polish yourself now can you hope to develop wonderful bonds of the heart in the future.

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.

FINDING YOUR MISSION

PEER PRESSURE

CHOOSING GOOD FRIENDS

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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I Am... by Yumi Look, Albany, Calif.

*I am a curious little girl,
I wonder about the future,
I hear those who cry for love,
I see the moon and stars,
I want to heal those thousands of wounds,
I am a curious little girl.*

*I pretend I have special powers,
I feel all the pressure in the world around me,
I touch my Hope Tree,
I worry about my family and others,
I cry when others hurt me,
I am a curious little girl.*

*I understand that everyone is different,
I say I can do anything I want to do,
I dream that I can change the world,
I try everything new,
I hope to be a pediatrician,
I am a curious little girl.*