

MIND











CIRCLE

Journal of the Sydney Zen Centre **Winter 2009**

Dedication

This issue of *Mind Moon Circle* chronicles the beginning of the Sydney Zen Centre. It records how we came to be. 2009 is the 50th anniversary of the Diamond Sangha and the 30th anniversary of Aitken Roshi's first visit to Australia to lead sesshin. These stories tell how we came from there to here.

It is dedicated to:

• Robert Aitken Roshi and Anne Hopkins Aitken, with deep gratitude for their wisdom, their teachings and their dedication to the way

It is also dedicated to:

• John Cooper, who guided so many to the way. A deep bow of gratitude.

Contents:

Kathy Ratliff ¹	Robert Aitken Roshi and Anne-Hopkins Aitken: Founding the	1
•	Diamond Sangha	
Leigh Davison	We all have questions	3
Patrick Kearney	Finding Bodhidharma	5
Paul Maloney	How a brolga came to the billabong: Confessions of a sleepwalker	6
Geoff Dawson	My time with the Sydney Zen Centre	9
Marion Bagot	Family Zen	11
Kim Bagot	In silence you hear its greeting and some meanderings	12
Subhana Barzhagi	I met a stone bridge in a tiny room	14
Gillian and Tony Coote	Sangha Building	16
Allan Marett	Asking the way to Cold Mountain	17
Brendon Stewart	I get to Zen in my car	19
Caroline Josephs	20 years with the Sydney Zen Centre	21
Philip Long	Phone Zen	22
Sally Hopkins	Mysteries glimpsed in the rear vision mirror	24
Carl Hooper	How did you?	25
Clinton Smith	Invocation	25
Jean Brick	Coming home	26
Brain Gutkin	How I got here	27
Larry Agriesti	From there to here	28
Jonathon Case	Getting here	29

Attributions for visuals used in this edition can be found on pages 15 and 20.

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Founding the Diamond Sangha Robert Aitken Roshi & Anne Hopkins Aiken:



Robert Baker Aitken first tasted Zen while he was interned in a Japanese prison camp during World War 11. He was a civilian employee on Guam when the Japanese invaded, and was taken to Japan for the duration of the war. There was little in the camp to read, but he was given a copy of R. H. Blythe's Zen in English Literature by a Japanese prison guard, and it captured his imagination. He read the book multiple times during his internment years, and surprisingly, met R. H. Blythe, who was interned in the same camp. Returning to California after the war, he searched for a Zen teacher, finally finding Senzaki Nyogen Roshi in San Francisco. He also met his second wife, Anne Arundel Hopkins, who hired him to teach English at the Happy Valley

School in Ojai, California. As soon as he could, he returned to Japan to pursue his Zen training, bringing along his new bride on their honeymoon. Senzaki Roshi gave him letters of introduction, and he became one of a cohort of now well-known Western Zen students that included Gary Snyder, Phillip Yampolski, and Ruth Fuller Sasaki. Eventually he worked with Yasutani Haku'un Roshi, and after Yasutani's death, with Yamada Koun Roshi in the Sanbo Kyodan line of Zen, a line that descended from Harada Roshi and combines elements of both Soto and Rinzai teachings.

Bob Aitken and his wife moved back to Hawaii, where he had grown up, to be near his young son Tom, who was living with Bob's first wife. He entreated both Yasutani and Yamada to lead sesshin in their small house in Kuliouou, and later in the house he and Anne purchased in Manoa Valley, and at the property they had acquired on Maui. Yasutani was able to do so on several occasions, and Yamada Roshi visited frequently and was integral in the formation and development of strong sanghas on Maui and in Honolulu. It was Yamada's inspiration that named the Manoa house Koko An, and the Hawaii group the Honolulu Diamond Sangha.

In 1974 Yamada gave Bob permission to teach. By this time, he was living most of the time on Maui, having inspired a large group of motley souls who were mostly hippies, with the Zen fever. He and Anne traveled back and forth to Honolulu, teaching at the Koko An Zendo in Manoa Valley. His book, *Taking the Path of Zen*, was published in 1982, and is still required reading for new students in the Honolulu Diamond Sangha. By the mid 1980s the sangha was concentrated in Honolulu and the Aitkens moved back to 0'ahu. The Maui Zendo property was sold and land was purchased to build a new practice center in Palolo Valley with living quarters for Aitken Roshi and his wife. This center was built mostly by Zen students, and was completed enough to hold the first sesshin in 1993. Anne died in 1994, and Robert Aitken retired from full-time teaching in 1996, moving to the Big Island of Hawaii to live near his now adult son Tom. In 2002 the Koko An property was sold and the sangha activities moved full time to the Palolo Zen Center.

Aitken Roshi named four of his students his direct descendants in the late 1980s; Nelson Foster, John Tarrant, Pat Hawk and Augusto Alcalde, all of whom started Zen centers of their own across the United States and the world. Others followed. At this celebration of the 50th anniversary celebration of the Diamond Sangha in Honolulu in 2009, Aitken Roshi is 92 years old. He is enjoying the presence of almost all of the 25 Zen teachers affiliated with the Diamond Sangha from Germany, Australia, New Zealand, and multiple states across the U.S. mainland. He is living at the Palolo Zen Center, in the heart of the sangha, and he continues to participate in its

activities as he is able. He has published 15 books over his lifetime and his teachings of authentic Zen continue to multiply around the world.

Anne Hopkins Aitken was born in Illinois in 1911 to a family of some means, and was able to travel during her early years, and also to study. She had a BA in English from Scripps College, and a MA in sociology from Northwestern. She was interested in poetry and art and literature. She traveled a lot, did volunteer work during the war, and enjoyed life, She was living with a group of friends in Mexico when she decided that it was time to begin her adult life. She moved to California and took a job as assistant to the headmaster at the Happy Valley School in Ojai. Anne always thought of herself as a person who enabled others to do great things. Her position as assistant to the headmaster put her in the place she felt she had the most skills. She was happiest being in the background. It was at the Happy Valley School that she met Robert Aitken - she hired him to teach English.

After their wedding, her new husband Bob Aitken whisked her away to Japan on their honeymoon - he, to pursue Zen training at Ryutakuji, and she - well, she wasn't sure what she was getting into. Anne's mother had pursued many spiritual paths and exposed her daughter to numerology, Krishnamurti, and other spiritual pursuits that she had come across. But Zen was new to Anne. At that first sesshin she was not a participant. She stayed in her room in the temple, wondering at the monks who hit others with a stick, the bell that rang intermittently

outside her door as sesshin participants sat waiting their turn for dokusan, and the serious expressions on their faces she saw when she peeked out at them. At the second sesshin, when her husband abandoned her yet again, putting her in the care of an elderly woman who lived across the fields from the zendo, she decided to see what it was all about. She couldn't bear to let the 80-year old woman traipse across the field to the temple at such an early hour by herself, and so Anne went with her.

By then, Anne realized that Zen was a serious pursuit, and she tried her best. The celebrations around the few practitioners who attained kensho at the end of sesshin made her realize that there might be something that mattered here. In her story, *In Spite of Myself*,



published in Kahawai, Anne talked about the 12 years she practiced before she was able to realize her own kensho. Her discouragement and disillusionment parallels many of our own experiences, and through writing about them, she encouraged us to persist. Although she enjoyed her koan study, she did not want to teach. She wrote about her joy in beginning her koan practice all over again in her later years.

Through this time, she and Bob were active in Hawaii, on Oahu and Maui, starting and nurturing a growing community of folks in their own Zen practice. Anne led work parties, supervised young undisciplined and idealistic hippies in building and maintaining temples on both islands, and forged ahead with her own practice. She inherited some money, and used it to support both her husband's Zen practice, and the fledgling Zen centers on Maui and Oahu. The Maui and Koko An Zendos were both purchased by Anne, and eventually donated to the sangha.

Anne was an inspiration to the members of the sangha. Her lightness of being, her strong enthusiasm for the practice, and her conviction about the potential of every person she came in contact with elevated her beyond the support person she envisioned herself to be. She particularly supported the women by listening, paying attention, and communicating her certainty that everything would work out just fine. When she invited you to tea you felt special.

2

Anne died of heart failure in 1994. She had been marshalling her energies carefully for several years before her death, but the end came swiftly, in just a few days. The last thing I heard her say, in a breathless and soundless utterance at her hospital bedside was whispered into Aitken Roshi's ear as he bent down to her. She said, 'I love you.'

The Kahawai editor's comment introducing Anne's article, 'In Spite of Myself', said, 'This sangha would not live without the love and dedication of Anne Aitken.' What a legacy for this beatific woman who liked to stand behind others. In spite of herself, indeed.



We all have questions

Leigh Davison



We all have questions. In the early 1960s two theories competed for the explanation of why the universe appeared to be expanding. One was the now familiar Big Bang Theory. The other was the Steady State Theory which proposed an expanding universe in which the gaps created by expansion were filled by matter which continuously manifested out of nothingness. I was a student of physics and found the Steady State Theory to be the more appealing of the two. But after reflecting on the issue of why matter would manifest out of nothing, either continuously or as a one-off singularity, I got stuck on the question of why would matter manifest at all. My question became 'why isn't there just nothing?'

Fast forward to January 1975. 'Sit like Buddha and you become Buddha!'. The speaker was a Japanese Zen monk, Rev. Shibuya. The place was the Japanese Temple at Bodh Gaya, India. Shibuya san had studied English literature in Japan and written a thesis on the works of William Wordsworth. His professor, unable to answer his question: 'What is mind?' had directed him to the local Zen temple, where he learned that there is a place beyond questions and answers and to get there you will need a zafu. On being posted to Bodh Gaya Shibuya san had trained a local tailor in the art of zafu making. I spent two months with Shibuya san, sitting for an hour with him twice a day and chanting the Heart Sutra every evening without having any understanding as to its meaning. The intervening hours were spent pleasantly enough, mostly in a restaurant run by Tibetan refugees, discussing topics like karma with other western travellers and Buddhist dabblers and dilettantes.

Karma works in strange ways. In 1974, just prior to my India trip, I had taken two Tibetan lamas to the Zoo. 'Fantastic karma,' I was told. When people realised that I was planning a trip to Nepal later that year, the eyebrows were raised even higher. 'You must visit their monastery in the Kathmandu Valley! Don't blow this karmic opportunity!' The purpose of the planned trip was to clear my mind after four years of post grad study on the stresses and deflections in the hulls of Royal Australian Navy frigates. The plan was to walk to the Everest base camp and back with a view to experiencing the scenery and the culture and to forgetting the recent frenzy of academic pursuit. After the walk I did go to the monastery, but found it difficult to visualise every sentient being as my mother in a previous incarnation. Rational mind still getting in the way. And it made me wonder about the karmic implications of my previous work on warship design. Too threatening. The higher you get in the game of spiritual snakes and ladders, it appeared, the further you can fall.

While the previous year's trip to the Zoo was said to be my reward for several lifetimes of saintly behaviour, I was in danger of blowing an opportunity that was said to be as unlikely as a turtle putting its head through a gold



ring thrown into the ocean. Nevertheless I had left Kathmandu with the lamas' blessings and headed for Bodh Gaya at their suggestion. The meeting with Shibuya san was timely and the practice refreshingly straightforward. For someone with an overly active left brain the idea of 'just sitting' had appeal. The incomprehensible Heart Sutra added a tinge of mystery. However the comfortable routine of my spiritual endeavour was interrupted by the karmic intervention of a hepatitis virus, which must have been carried by a fly from the pit toilet at the Tibetan restaurant to my plate of chapattis and scrambled eggs. It was late March and the north Indian plain was already heating up. No place to recover from hep. Where to go? I was about to flip a coin in New Delhi. Heads to London, tails back to Sydney, a job and everyday life. But as fate would have it I met an old acquaintance on her way from London back to Sydney. She gave me the address of a squat in London where I could stay for free. That's karma for you. I knew I wasn't quite ready for everyday life. I put the coin away and packed my zafu for the flight to England where I discovered Throssel Hole Priory, a Zen monastery in Northumberland. I found the daily routine of

four one hour zazen periods interspersed with periods of mindful work most agreeable. The abbot was a chubby cheerful gent whose previous job had been lead guitar in a rock band. The sutras were chanted in English to the tune of a Gregorian chant. I spent a total of two months there. There was a sense of loss in learning what the Heart Sutra was all about. This was offset by the realisation of its relevance to my question.

On returning to Sydney in late 1975 I started looking for others with whom to sit zazen. Within a short time Paul Maloney, Peter Thompson and Liz Statis were coming around to my mother's place in Brisbane Avenue, East Lindfield. An old acquaintance, Stuart Glanfield, was looking to set up a Buddhist house and he and I rented a place in Norwood Avenue, Lindfield in early 1976. We held regular weekly sittings and monthly overnight zazenkai. John Cooper's yoga class proved to be a fruitful recruiting ground and before long a sangha of committed practitioners had emerged. The events at Norwood Ave were complemented by Sunday sittings at John and Shirley Coopers beautiful studio at Hunters Hill. Jeff Dawson arrived fresh from a long period of Zen practice in Kyoto. It became clear to us that do-it-yourself Zen was a good way to start but that we really needed to hook up with an established teacher. A group in New Zealand was having annual sesshin with Sazaki Roshi and a few of us went over for a

sesshin near Wellington. Meanwhile Jeff had acquired a cassette tape of a talk by Robert Aitken Roshi. The idea of an American teacher was appealing. We made contact and Roshi sent us personalised tapes and was very encouraging. Jeff and I decided to go to Hawaii to make direct contact and enrolled in the training period at Maui Zendo to commence in June 1978. Meanwhile the early months of 1978 had been particularly active with a bunch of us travelling to the Forest Meditation Centre at The Channon (Lismore area) for a one week retreat. Then an Easter sesshin at Dungog in a converted milking shed. Up to my departure for Maui I had been the secretary of what had emerged as the Sydney Zen Group. This office was taken up by Patrick Kearney on my departure.

And with that, I'll let Patrick take up the story.



Finding Bodhidharma

Patrick Kearney

How did I come to the practice of Zen? Through a cushion, and a posture. Let me explain.

Early in 1976 I travelled to Sri Lanka and India in search of a meditation practice. As an existentially-troubled professional university student, I had experienced a revelation while reading Nyanaponika Thera's book, *The heart of Buddhist meditation*. Reading it I knew, 'I have to do this!' Nothing seemed available in Australia at the time, so I dropped out of university and went to Asia. Where, instead of enlightenment I found hepatitis. Late in 1976 I was back home, wondering how to proceed.

At this point, I saw an advertisement in the paper about a talk to be given by a visiting Tibetan lama in North Sydney. I attended, and found the lama's dharma talk to be extremely boring. But he was conducting a weekend retreat in Sydney, and I went along to meditate and listen to more talks. While his talks continued to be boring, there was one thing that caught my interest.

In the meditation hall I was sitting on a hopelessly inadequate cushion in a hopelessly inadequate posture when, in a moment of distraction, I noticed the cushion next to me. Big. Black. Firm. Supporting. I thought, 'I've got to get a cushion like that!' Then I noticed the legs supported by the cushion, wrapped in full lotus, the back rising vertically, and the hands in perfect mudra. I thought, 'I've got to get a posture like that!'

At the time I was too shy to speak to the owner of the cushion and posture, but I did have the presence of mind to sign on to a mailing list he distributed at the end of the retreat. The only communication I received from it was an advertisement for a yoga course run by a fellow named John Cooper. I went, and there, in the class, was my cushion-posture owner, cheerfully doing impossible asanas. At the end of the class John allowed him to advertise a regular meditation gathering he had



doing impossible asanas. At the end of the class John allowed
him to advertise a regular meditation gathering he had
organised, which he called the Sydney Zen Group. Lusting after both cushion and posture, I joined up.

I am speaking, of course, of Leigh Davison. I joined the Sydney Zen Group because they offered the appropriate technology for the job (refer to cushion, above), meditation periods of appropriate length (30 minutes, later, in a clear indication of the decline of the dharma, reduced to 25), and instructions in posture. Also, they offered what I have never seen so strongly displayed in a meditation group since — a robust sense of self reliance. We had no teacher. We were not just practising Zen, we were inventing it as we went along, supporting each other in our discovery of the dharma. It was this determination, I think, that attracted Robert Aitken Rōshi to Australia.

After three years with the Sydney Zen Group, I followed our pioneers to Hawaii. I planned to do a three month training period at the Maui Zendo before returning to Asia, but stayed two years — I liked it there! As for Zen practice, the Rōshi examined me on the Mu kōan, but resolutely refused to accept my 'I don't know' as equivalent to Bodhidharma's 'I don't know.' I am tempted to say I don't know why he did this, but suspect I do know why.

I returned to Asia to find what I found missing in my Zen training — the specifics of meditation method. Not naturally talented in this regard, I needed to be taught how to meditate. I kept asking the Rōshi questions along the lines of, 'Such-&-such happened during the last sitting period, so I did this-&-that — was that right?' But he was not interested. He just wanted to know about Mu. I was more interested in meditation itself.

It was in Burma, at the Mahāsī Centre, that I received the detailed training in meditation practice, as well as an introduction to the classical Buddhist tradition, that I was looking for. Years later I became a dharma teacher in the lineage of Mahāsī Sayādaw, and my main focus has been the conveying of a skill — the art and craft of meditation practice. I have also studied the Buddha's life and teachings, in an effort to understand what he was trying to convey to us. While I was living at the Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre as their resident teacher I renewed my friendship with my old Zen mate, Paul Maloney, with whom I would occasionally discuss the idea of a return to the Mu kōan, to see if I could really not know what was going on.

Eventually Paul became authorised to teach, and not long after came to the Centre and announced, 'Right! Now we can talk!' He hustled me off to begin my kōan training. Thus I got sucked in again. Now I find myself exploring the Zen tradition from a base in the Theravāda, not trying to force them together, but allowing them to inform each other.

As to this 'Mu' business, I'm still working on not-knowing. It's difficult, though. Too simple. Even 'I don't know' is too much. And working on not-knowing is far too much. Maybe I'll go for a walk, instead.



How a Brolga Came to the Billabong: Confessions of a Sleepwalker Paul Maloney

Marked by encounters with passing strangers and unexplained choices, my journey to the SZC started 50 years ago. At the age of 20 I was trying to come to terms with two major issues in my life: the Death of God, and the prospect of nuclear annihilation in the event that the Cold War became hot. A life expectancy of 20 minutes is not very comforting.

Kirkegaard's Christian existentialism held no appeal for me, although I had some admiration for the atheistic existentialists, such as Satre, for their stance in the face of nothingness and absurdity. However, I did not feel satisfied with their response to the Death of God. In fact, one of the things that first attracted me to the Way of Zen was that its exponents seemed to be able to play in the void, rather than stand in despair on the edge of the abyss.

In 1959 'Australian Zen' was the antipodean child of American 'beat Zen': a strange creature marked by Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Camus, washed down with red wine and black coffee to the accompaniment of modern Jazz. It was a long way from where we are now, but it was good fun all the same. I had to start my journey somewhere.

It's 1961 and I am living in Melbourne, having dropped out of university and given up my engineering cadetship. During the day I am working on tool design drawings for the Mirage jet fighter, and hanging out with 11artists at night. Existential ambivalence. In my boarding house room one Thursday night I answer a knock on

my door. A stranger introduces himself as George (??), a yoga practitioner on his way to India to find a guru. A mutual friend in Sydney had asked him to call on me when his ship reached Melbourne. Knowing nothing about yoga, I listen to what he has to say. He gives me a list of books on yoga-related subjects and departs; out of the door, and out of my life. The following Saturday I go down the road and discover a newly opened second hand bookshop. I walk in as if drawn by a magnet, go straight to the back of the shop, reach down to the lowest shelf. Sitting there are three of the books on George's list, 10 shillings each; a bargain. I hurry home and read with wonder and awe. My mind is opened up to new possibilities. Hinduism, the Vedanta, Yoga. Thank you George, wherever you may be.

Back in Sydney in '61 I start hatha yoga. Continue reading Zen while drinking red wine and black coffee, a denizen of Lorenzini's Bistro. The 'zen' in denizen is the closest I get to the subject in these years.

In '63 I return to Sydney after another year in Melbourne. I start modern dance training with Margaret Barr, who introduces me to my body. Until now its main function has been to carry my head around. In finding my body I also find movement and rhythm. It is a wonderful gift. Thank you Margaret, and all those, including a very young Caroline Josephs, who danced with me during those five wonderful years.

One day in '65 friends visiting from Melbourne invite me to a pub lunch – beer and steak. It is at that moment I make the decision that is to change the course of my life. I decline their invitation and choose to go to a Lebanese vegetarian restaurant in Liverpool Street. There I run into Russell Atkinson, my former yoga teacher, who introduces me to his dining companion whose name I promptly forget. What I do not forget is what he tells me. He has been studying Aikidō in Sydney! How can that be, I enquire, as I only know of Aikido as a mysterious Japanese Martial Art. Not so, he replies, there is a Japanese Aikidō teacher teaching in West Ryde. I go to the class the same night and my life is re-directed. The stranger never went Aikido again. I, on the other hand practiced every week.

It is June 1966 and I am sitting on a beach looking into a fire. I have been on this beach for almost two weeks. I had a deep urge to get away by myself and sit on a beach, and somehow ended up on a desert island. Just me, me without books: that was difficult for the first few days, as I could not remember a time without books. That time alone, without the possibility of escaping into words, has changed me. I have sunk into a deep quiet and, looking into the fire, I notice that I am, ever so subtly, anxious. And I notice that this anxiety is a chronic condition, one that I had always been too busy to notice. And I ask myself, 'Why am I afraid?' The question sinks into me, and I sink into the question. I go to bed with the question. It turns out to be a 'natural koan,' although I did know that there was such a thing at the time.



I have a dream that I am standing outside a stone castle with six doors. I enter each one and walk to the centre. I each case I find no one there, the castle is empty. And I understand that I have no self, there is no one to protect. The castle has been constructed in vain. I wake up, go outside in the dark. I now understand that the wind, waves, trees, everything, including me, are but the forms of a universal 'substance.' Years later I read Hakuin's *Song of Zazen*, 'All beings by nature are Buddha, as ice by nature is water.' We are all brothers and sisters. More

to the point, I understand that dying is nothing more than an ice cube falling into the ocean. The form dissolves while the 'water' goes on. I am at peace. I like this feeling.

It is October '66, and I am on another beach, this time north of Cairns. In *The Matter of Zen*, I read that when it comes to Zen there are two things. There is reading about Zen, and there is the practice of Zen. These two should not be confused, so don't think you are doing one while you are doing the other. This struck home. I fashioned some sand and made my first 'zafu', sat down and started zazen for the first time. It had taken me seven years to reach this point on my Zen Way. I do zazen every day, morning and evening for the next three months, gradually deepening my practice. Returning to Sydney I continued with my zazen and determine to go to Japan.

It is May '68 and I am in the Aikidō dōjo in Tokyo, having been gifted with a rare cultural studies visa allowing me to stay in Japan for six months. I tell myself that I have come to Japan to study Zen, but in fact all I'm doing is Aikidō. But hey, hasn't D.T. Suzuki told the world that Zen and the Sword are one (zen ken ichi)? So if I am studying martial arts I am also studying Zen, right? Well, no, not right. But self deception is a great comfort. Furthermore, Aikido has nothing to do with Zen as its spiritual basis is Shinto not Buddhism. But I did not know that either.

Sunday 1 December 1968, the start of my first sesshin at Ruytakuji with Nakagawa Sōen Roshi. I have come with the expectation of getting enlightened, instead I get a week of pain! The zazen pain is to be my faithful companion for many years. I am



like a hungry dog by a vat of boiling fat; enticed by the smell but wary of the pain. Suzuki had not mentioned the pain. Then again, he did not mention that zazen was central to Zen. In retrospect it can be seen that there was much of Zen that he did not mention. Philip Kapleau, in his *Three Pillars of Zen*, was much more realistic about the practice. I was introduced to his wife in Kamakura, but that was before I had read his book. So I did not realise until many years later how close I had come to meeting Yamada Roshi and possibly even to Aitken Roshi. Such is life.

Instead of sitting with the Sanbokyodan, I find myself practicing at Engakuji, one of the oldest Zen temples in Japan. It was at Engakuji that I learned to really sit. At the interview prior to starting practice, Adachi Roshi asked me why I wanted to do zazen? I bit the bullet and confessed I wanted satori. He said, 'All you foreigners are like that. If I had satori I would be dead.' I realise, once again, I still have much to learn about Zen. In particular, the closer one comes to practice, the less one hears about satori or enlightenment.

It is 1974. I am back in Sydney with an interest in starting a Japanese cultural centre and have been advised that I should talk to a John Cooper at the Australia Council. So here I am sitting opposite John Cooper, this large jovial man with a full beard and glasses, and a great smile. While sitting there I suddenly realised that he is the stranger who directed me to the Aikidō teacher so many years before. And here we were again: the circle was complete. He is as pleased as I am surprised. From there I attend his yoga classes, and it is here I first meet Leigh Davison. In the meantime I continued to sit zazen by myself.

Late in '75 Leigh calls me after returning from close encounters with Zen in India and England. He suggests we start doing zazen together at his mother's house. On the first night there were three of us, Leigh, Liz Stanis and me. That is how the Sydney Zen sangha started. I often wonder if, had Leigh not called, would I still be sitting alone?

Sunday 18 February, my 40th birthday, and the first day of our first sesshin with Aitken Roshi. I am sitting with Mu. Home at last, after 20 years of wandering, lost on dark paths of ignorance. I gassho in gratitude to all those who did so much to set me right.

My time with the Sydney Zen Centre

Geoff Dawson

I began my Zen training in Japan in 1976. I had travelled there specifically for that purpose as there were no Zen teachers or Zen groups anywhere in Australia at that time. I studied with Kobori Roshi at Daitokuji in Kyoto for one year. At the end of that time I decided that I didn't want to become a Zen monk but I was serious about practice and wanted to belong to a Zen community to further my training. Kobori Roshi told me about Robert Aitken Roshi who headed a Lay Zen Community in Hawaii and who would be a suitable teacher for me. I returned to Sydney planning to follow up this lead.

In Sydney I met Paul Maloney, who was working at the Japan Information Centre. He told me about a small group of people who were sitting together in Lindfield and suggested I contact Leigh Davison, who had started a Zen meditation group. This was the seed from which the Sydney Zen Centre grew. Leigh was (and still is) a fine gardener and the seed flourished. I remember vividly many people from those early days. Paul Maloney, Kim Bagot and Marion Bagot, Peter Thompson, Patrick Kearney to mention just a few. Leigh had also started a newsletter called *Nothing Special*, which some years later when I became the editor, I changed (for better or for worse) to its present name *Mind, Moon, Circle*.

Leigh had written to a number of Zen teachers to invite them to come to Australia to teach. However he never got any takers. I then wrote to Robert Aitken to explore the idea of practising with him in Hawaii and also to invite him to Sydney. He responded very warmly and generously and began to regularly send tapes of Dharma talks, general chit chat and encouragement. In the meantime, we also held the first sesshin in Australia, without a teacher, at the Forest Centre built by Subhana and other community members of Bodhi Farm and Dharmananda. This must have been a very formative sesshin as there are number of people who did this first sesshin who have gone on to become teachers, Subhana, Paul Maloney, Chi Kwang, and myself.

As far as coming to Australia was concerned, Robert Aitken proposed that some of us go over to Hawaii first to train to see whether anything could grow organically from it. However he was already rather impressed that we had conducted a sesshin without a teacher as this was unheard of in America or Japan. The Australians started to get a reputation as quite a feisty lot!

Leigh, myself, John Tarrant and Susan Murcott. John's American partner at the time, went together to Hawaii in 1978 and began our first training period at the Maui Zendo. Robert Aitken soon decided that we were serious and decided to go to Sydney the following year and hold sesshin. I was not at that first sesshin in Burradoo as I was still training in Hawaii but I believe it attracted about 30 people. Aitken Roshi came with Michael Kieran as his assistant and they continued to come each year for many years.

In the meantime, Leigh returned to Australia with Ellen Davison after one year in Hawaii and they married and settled at Dharmananda in The Channon near Lismore. John and Susan continued to live in Hawaii and I returned to Sydney after two years.

By that time the Sydney Zen Group had moved from Lindfield to meeting in a Buddhist temple in China town. I was keen to develop the group further and have our own place so I rented a terrace house in Kirribilli across the road from Paul Maloney and it became the centre of the Sydney Zen Group's activities. After six months we found more suitable accommodation back in Lindfield and were there until 1986. During this time the group grew in both depth and numbers with an ongoing schedule of daily sitting, zazenkais and sesshin, conducted with and without a teacher. Robert Aitken continued to come each year and nurture the group and other people started to go to Hawaii for more intensive practice. The roots were becoming deeper and the relationships stronger.

One year, I think 1982, Robert Aitken was having a long bout of illness and I was over in Hawaii visiting him and doing sesshin. He was too ill to come to Australia the following year and I asked him to suggest an alternative teacher. He recommended Charlotte Joko Beck, who held sesshin in Burradoo in his place. A number of people from Brisbane and Sydney were very impressed with Joko and her style of teaching. In order to avoid any conflict of interest, it was decided that Joko would continue to visit Australia as the teacher of the Brisbane Zen Group.

During this time I was keen to find land to start a country retreat centre as well as having a city centre. I found Gorrick's Run after much searching and as soon as I drove up onto that wide open paddock after travelling through muddy creeks and winding back roads, I knew in my gut that this was it.

The Sydney Zen Group became incorporated as the Sydney Zen Centre and after some difficult legal wrangles with the vendors that lasted over a year, we finally owned it - or it owned us. Tony Coote designed the first building and supervised the construction over many, many working weekends. In the meantime, the group moved from Lindfield to Killara for about a year and finally moved to Young Street Annandale where it remains today.



Postscript

In writing about my involvement with the Sydney Zen Centre I have been pondering over whether certain unpleasant aspects should be left out, but decided to present the bare facts without apportioning blame.

In 1991, along with Subhana and Ross Bolleter, I became an apprentice Zen teacher under John Tarrant. In 1992 I moved to live in Hobart with my newly wedded wife, Diana and set up a Hobart Zen Group. After a conflict with John Tarrant over the way decisions were being made, my apprentice teacher status was revoked by John,

and in either 92 or 93 I withdrew my membership of the Sydney Zen Centre and the Diamond Sangha. This decision was not made by Robert Aitken but he supported John as the senior teacher and this led to my loss of trust in him as a teacher.

My decision to stay or to leave the Diamond Sangha came down to a decision of maintaining personal integrity or the need to belong to a Dharma family that had been very important to me in my life. It was a very painful experience for me emotionally. I had been frustrated with the decision making process of the Sydney Zen Centre and some of the directions the Sangha was going in for some time and the revocation of my teaching role was the catalyst that finally led me to leaving.

After I left I furthered my training and my relationship with Charlotte Joko Beck over another ten years, set up the Ordinary Mind Zen School in Sydney and received Dharma Transmission from Joko in 1993.

In the meantime I initiated a reconciliation some years ago with Robert Aitken, not with the intention of rejoining the Diamond Sangha, but just to put matters to rest. It was not successful and I let the matter go and came to the conclusion that the only resolution was that there was no resolution. However I met up with Roshi a few years ago in Hawaii with the view to just having a chat as old friends, and we parted warmly. There is truth in the clichéd expression that time (plus practice) heals all wounds. I am hoping to meet up with him again later this year on my way to see Joko. Both of them are well into their nineties and I would like to see them again face to face before they pass on to express my gratitude for the teaching they have generously given me.





Family Zen

Marion Bagot

I came to Zen through John Cooper. First some basic breath counting at the end of his yoga classes; then a day of introductory zazen at his place – a Sunday of sunlight and stillness there in the bush – my first introduction to the power of silence. And to Leigh, generous with yoghurt cheese, raw cauliflower salad and an air of chuckling even in stillness. After that lunch, time for questions and the somewhat scary Paul Maloney with his absolute attitude to dealing with pain.

From there, weekly zazen at Leigh and Stewart's in Norwood Avenue, and later in the old Chinese Buddhist temple before Dixon Street was done up, with intermittent Chinese visitors offering bunches of incense at the altar while we sat. The night when we took the wrong staircase and found ourselves in a doss house of elderly Chinese men.

I didn't mind zazen on the whole, but Kim had seen the light. It was years before I caught myself running from the kitchen to the dojo, and realized I actually wanted to be there. But at the beginning, Kim couldn't understand why I was lukewarm; I couldn't understand the passion. There seemed no choice but to go along with it – not unusual I guess, where passion confronts the lukewarm. I resisted my first zazenkai; I hoped fervently that the rising waters would keep us from getting to our first Easter sesshin at Dungog. Still, I have fond memories of

sitting in the old cowshed there – keeping an eye out for the floorboards in kinhin; cooking with Paul, shocked that he would signal lunch before Leigh signalled the end of sitting. We were working things out as we went in those days.

We also held sesshin at Wat Buddha Dharma in the days before we had a teacher. I recall waiting in the predawn to use the kitchen, while the stars faded to thin musical chanting about galaxies. For years I sat on a zafu

stained with sap from the first sala there, built with Sydney Zen assistance and uncured pine.



Aitken Roshi came in February of 1979, while Geoff was in Hawaii and I was pregnant with Kathy. For most of us, it was all new. I recall the naïve excitement of getting things ready, and Kim saying how great the dojo looked with blankets neatly folded to sit on; I recall also, Michael Kieran later saying how he had despaired that first evening of getting things together. I started learning at that sesshin that sitting and children don't mix in ways that sustain romantic illusions. I was seeking stillness; whenever I started to find it, Kathy would turn and heave, bothered somehow by the lack of movement and dashing my illusions of enlightenment.

The next year, we moved to the OLSH sisters at Burradoo, where we sat for several years – the beginning for Kim and me of half sesshins, with one of us always with the children. Wanting uninterrupted concentration, I learned that sitting is sitting and silence cannot be imposed on a child who, after all, had no commitment to zen practice, and plenty to teach. And I had to learn to listen. For years I didn't really understand Roshi telling me that it was a whole sesshin I was doing.

Zazen for me was interwoven with children. Carrying the baby basket up the stairs in China Town. Getting up early one day a week to sit at Geoff and Lisa's place, trying not to wake the baby, who would delay me for feeding. Organising work bees at our old place in West Ryde and Kathy learning to suck her first apple at one of these while people pinned and sewed and stuffed around us. It was good to work communally to make the zafus and zabuton we sat on, and I was sorry when the communal interest was no longer there. And later the years of taking turns to go to sesshin, Kim returning to hugs from the kids, with the smell of someone who has been away.



In silence you hear it's greeting, and some meanderings

Kim Bagot

Meeting Robert Aitken Roshi in person for the first time in 1979 was an axis point in my life. It had the feel of encountering a character who has stepped out of a book, of experience out of time. I had been sitting with the Zen Group since 1976, and listening to tapes of his teishos had revealed a path of great integrity and earnest life practice where I felt I was coming home. I had been seeking relief from the anxieties which from time to time had riven my life - Roshi's full-hearted walking of the Way showed me the way through my difficulties.

I had been musing on ideas of Buddhism from childhood. My dad, who took his books and religion seriously, once gave me a book which revolves around the journey of a Buddhist monk on a quest to find the fabled sacred

river started by Shakyamuni. The river had sprung up where an arrow fired by the Buddha fell to earth. In primary school I was enchanted by the voices of the bewildering array of characters, castes, religions, and regions presented in this story through the words of the characters scooped from life by the gifted journalist Kipling. To help open one's ears to Kipling, who is sometimes dismissed as an unthinking jingoist, it is good to recall that T. S. Eliot wrote of Kipling, 'on the whole it is the Indian characters who are treated with the understanding of love'. In India, the monk on pilgrimage from Tibet adopts an Anglo-Indian street orphan, Kim (!), who looks after the unworldly monk. When the monk arrives, it is in a tumultuous Lahore bazaar. In his poise and other-worldliness he 'looks like such a man whom Kim, who thought he knew all castes, had never seen'. At the end of the book the monk realizes that the sacred river is flowing right beneath his feet, and 'smiles the smile of one who has found liberation for himself and his beloved'. This unfolded much later for me in Zen practice.



As Roshi and Michael emerged into the tumult through the doorway at Sydney International Airport I was focusing on my breath, not thinking anything in particular, waiting with Marion and Paul. I recognised Roshi from a distance: he looked older than in any photo. With a pensive poise like no other man I had ever seen, and a gait somehow noble without a hint of arrogance, Roshi put me in mind of a long-legged wading bird mindfully choosing each foothold: maybe he was jet-lagged. His gaze suggested perhaps the alertness of someone lost, but thinking about it. Now I think he was returning to his breath and the silence he seemed to lapse into in many social settings. In any case they both stood out in silence from the madding crowd.

I'm not sure what I was expecting but his first appearance left lasting impressions. Roshi's black suit and shoes somehow advertised impermanence - later he told me that he had been trying to use non-leather shoes

but gave up. The suit seemed Japanese in style, old-fashioned and maybe hand-stitched. In the spirit of truthful reporting, I have to say that when closer I noticed a small amount of dandruff on his shoulders; returning home with Michael later, as we walked through the door Patrick happened to ring. For fun I picked it up and just said, 'He's arrived, he's real, and he's got dandruff!'. Patrick exclaimed, 'How real is that!' Michael got a big laugh with this story later in an orientation talk illustrating Zen's avoidance of setting up teachers as gurus.

As I studied Roshi's long, intelligent face I became aware of an asthma wheeze, an evocative sound for me as my father, especially, as well as several siblings, were chronic asthma suffers. At the same moment I met the brightest blue eyes, which I can only say shone with kindness and wisdom. Gazing and absorbing all these impressions, I simply forgot to speak or greet him. Perhaps I was thinking he would speak first, but I was resting in a comfortable, connected space. After a long moment, Roshi with a gentle expression of his eyes and a half-nod, indicated that I should say something, which I did, welcoming him. I had never experienced this sort of stopping before, having been born, I believe, in a voluble and anxious caste.

I think Roshi felt a lot of affinity with the Zen Group. He said that when he heard we were doing sesshin without a teacher he just had to come. He seemed comfortable with Australians and the Australian sense of humour. He said once he wanted to be reborn as Australian. At the Diamond Sangha 50th anniversary celebrations in 2009 he reminisced about his travels and said that he came to Australia to learn about a sense of humour, retelling a story from our first trip to the Blue Mountains thirty years before; he repeatedly offered money for petrol until one of us said (ironically), 'Typical Yank! Coming down here trying to throw your money around!'... Well, anyway, he laughed a lot

I met a stone bridge in a tiny room

Subhana Barzaghi

I climbed an old rickety stair case, red paint worn down to the boards, to the first floor of the Chinese Buddhist Temple in the centre of Chinatown. Even on the first floor the evening bustle and clamour from the street permeated the dimly lit room and the smell of incense melded with the aromas of Chinese wok-fried cooking wafting up from below. The ornate red and gold painted ceilings and gaudy decorative dragon archways and walls bombard my senses: it seemed an unlikely place to meet a Zen master. I had travelled more than 600 kilometres from the wet sup-tropical sclerophyll forests of the Northern Rivers to meet with Robert Aitken Roshi. His reputation preceded him, he was known to a handful of people in the dharma circles in the alternative communities of the Northern Rivers. Dear friends Ellen and Leigh Davison, who lived on the neighbouring community, had inspired me to meet him. The journey was confirmed after consulting with the I Ching which advised, 'it furthers one to see the great man'. I was a passionate, determined, yet naive 25 year old, full of unrealistic expectations and stories about enlightened sages. I expected to meet a towering, fierce samurai figure of a Zen master in a serene, austere, holy place. On the contrary, the Chinese Temple was a colourful oriental brocade of a place, like a revamped geisha past her prime. It was not a serene meditation room, more like an exotic aviary, a cacophony of disjointed foreign sounds and Aitken Roshi was a quiet, reserved, serious gentleman.



My surprise meeting with Roshi reminds me of an old Zen story about a monk's expectations on meeting great master Zhaozhou.

A monk said, I have heard about the great stone bridge of Zhaozhou for a long time, but I've come and found just a simple log bridge.'

Zhaozhou said, 'You see only the simple log bridge and you don't see the stone bridge.'

The monk asked, 'What is the stone bridge?'

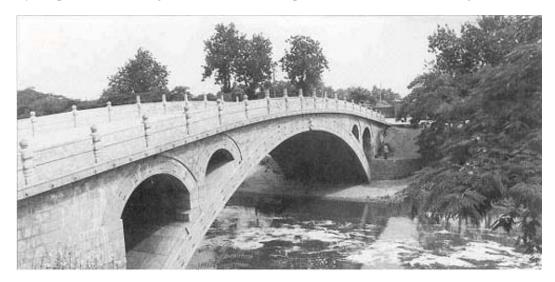
Zhaozhou said, 'Donkeys and horses cross over'.

When the monk actually meets Zhaozhou, he intentionally downgrades Zhaozhou's grandeur. He cannot see beyond the appearance of things and probably encounters Zhaozhou in his simple work clothes, mindfully raking the leaves in the monastery grounds. Teachers of old were often named after prominent mountains and places. Hence the teacher Zhaozhou was named after the province and city of Zhaozhou, which was also renowned for its great stone bridge. Zen master Zhaozhou's mind was fluid, and played with the confusion and inter-changeability of person/place as a teaching device. He is saying, you don't see the great stone bridge of Zhaozhou, you don't see the expansive

selfless heart-mind of nirvana where all beings cross over and abide here: donkeys, horses and even small minded monks.

Back in the hall of the Chinese Temple, in 1979, a small, motley bunch of folk had positioned themselves on the bare floor to listen to Roshi's dharma talk. After the public talk, I requested a personal interview to see if I wanted to sign up to the forthcoming seven day Zen sesshin. I was ushered into a tiny room more like a broom cupboard or a confessional cubicle and suddenly I was sitting face to face with this Zen master. How strange,

how terrifying and how wonderful! I found his black robed, upright posture formal, silent presence and intense gaze somewhat unnerving and confronting. After my initial moment of shock, I managed to gather myself and ask him the most challenging questions that I could muster. His responses were clear and to the point. I considered myself part of the new age movement of 'free-spirits' in the 1970's, the beat generation and was



Zhaozhou's stone bridge

instantly confronted with the formality and traditional etiquette of Zen. Yet, in that tiny cubicle of a moment, my heart opened and I knew that I could trust this quiet, serious man. I could bear my soul to him. I had come with a heavy heart, full of angst and turmoil. I felt he could indeed meet and see what was still not yet at peace in me. Here in this bizarre little room was the great stone bridge of Aitken Roshi. I had found a true teacher. As the door opened the aroma of Chinese noodles enticed me downstairs and nourished another more palpable pocket of hunger. Little did I know that that moment of trust would span thirty years and pave the way for a deep and long-term commitment and relationship to Zen practice and the Diamond Sangha.

I met a stone bridge in a tiny room, my heart fell open, laughing.



Attributions: Visuals on pages 2-23

Bronwyn Oliver	Freshwater	2
Deiryu	Begging monks	4
Anonymous	Xuanzang: Seeking scriptures in the west.	5
Sengai	Linji	7
Glenys Jackson	Seedheads	8
Glenys Jackson	Early Morning, Gorrick's Run	10
Anonymous	Thousand-armed Guanyin	11
Bronwyn Oliver	Ammonite	14
Anonymous	Zazen	13
Anonymous	Tenryu-ji ceiling painting: Dragon	14
Anonymous	Zhaozhou's stone bridge	15
Gillian and Tony Coote	Gillian and Tony Coote	16
Hokusai	Mount Fuji	17-18
Hans Heysen	Gum Trees	19
Gail Burrows-Davis	Culburra	21

Sangha Building

Gillian and Tony Coote



Tony and I have been members of SZC for nearly thirty years, through thick and thin, turmoil and disenchantment, joy and friendship, inspired by Roshi and Anne's example of clarity, virtue and discipline, and by the many Diamond Sanghas and teachers we have encountered on the way.

In 1980, through mutual friends John & Shirley Cooper, we first met Roshi further up this river. He inspired trust in the Dharma, and Tony took a leap and went off to sesshin. So we began sitting with the small group of Zen students in Sydney who had paved the way in the 1970's, some travelling to Hawaii to train with Roshi. Sydney's first sesshin with Roshi was held in 1979, then annually for nearly ten years, in the beginning with Michael Kieran, later with Anne.

In 1982, inspired by Gary Snyder (on an Australia Council visit to Australia), we journeyed with our son Gully to the San Juan Ridge to help with the Ring of Bone Zendo building, where we discovered an energetic, creative and joyful sangha. This experience led to the purchase and gradual development of our wilderness zendo at Gorricks Run; Kodoji, where people worked side-by-side one weekend a month over many years, getting to know each other well, working side-by-side. Hammering and painting are indeed the voice of the law. Samu builds sangha.

HDS women began producing Kahawai in the late 70's, which provided support and inspiration for a women's group to form in SZC, meeting monthly since its inception, and holding annual women's retreats. And when Roshi spoke of the fledgling Buddhist Peace Fellowship in the early 1980's, the baton was taken up, first by the Northern Rivers folk, and then handed on to SZC people in Sydney, where BPF was active for over fifteen years.

On this 50th anniversary of the Diamond Sangha, we celebrate the virtues and values of our lay tradition, embodied by Anne and Roshi, the long line of teachers past, present and future, and the trees and stones and clouds. Thank you all.

Asking the way to Cold Mountain Allan Marett

Victoria University Wellington 1968

Ah, these chancy John Cage works!

What does dice throw'n have

to do with Zen?
Not a lot!

Economical!

The Kanze Noh Theatre,

Suidobashi 1972

Economical!
So intensely focused!
Utterly mysterious!

this Noh
captivates
me far more than

Cage.

Jesus College Cambridge 1973

Fresh from a year at Tassahara

Jonathan joins our research team.

We sit together every day

It helps keep the blues at bay.

Throssel Hole monastery, Yorkshire 1973 – 1974

Work, sit, work, sit for seven days (twice)

Selling water by the river!

The good old Soto way

Enkakuji, Kamakura 1976

Whack, whack, whack dokusan! thump, thump!
Mari and i run away
This is no way

to celebrate her birthday.

Juniso 1976

Fresh from a year at Bukkokuji Herb and Judy join my language class.

Roshi's name for the first time I say: this too might keep

the blues away

Hearing Yamada





Sanunzendo Kamakura 1976

Why are you here? He asks

I'm interested in Buddhism, I say (oh dear)

But he is kind and so

I don't sit outside the gate in the snow for three day.

Why are you here? he asks again.

To keep the blues away,
I say

Wrong!

I should have said: To realise my own self nature.

(oh deary me!)

The Omachi House Kamakura 1976

The zen house has a visitor!

Bob Aitken! (as he is known then)

we meet on the mossy path drink tea and okashi and talk of temples

Japan Information Centre Sydney 1978

Paul says: Aitken Roshi is coming to Sydney to lead sesshin.

You mean Bob Aitken? I (now) famously ask and here I am.

Palolo Zen Centre Honolulu 2008

I thought I came here to put my-self back together

but now I find

that each and every piece is nothing but

the whole deal

I get to Zen in my car

Brendon Stewart

Spring opens the hundred flowers in one puff

I like the drive home after sitting on Monday nights. Usually Kerry asks, *did you have good sit?* I mostly say *yes, did you?* And then we drive home in silence (sometimes). Simple questions. Did you have good sit?

Writing about the path taken, as a Zen student could be a little like an obituary and so I hesitate.

Once upon a time there was a Yoga teacher, John Copper. One of his favourite postures he called The Hans Heysen Asana. We each would stretch as high as a gum tree, our bodies swaying slightly as we pushed the extension and John would walk in and around us, calling on the great Australian gum tree painter, to push our hans heysen. John laughed and smiled through his classes.

John lectured at Sydney University, taking on a mixed assortment of classes in Religious studies. He also knew Robert Aitken. John was a Buddhist of sorts. Sometime in the middle 1970's he invited anyone interested to come along to his home in Boronia Park, for an introduction to meditation. I think I went once.

The heavenly pillar so high and lofty

Tony Coote reported back from one of the first Sesshins lead by Aitken Roshi that you only had one set of eating bowls and after each meal you would wash and clean these with lemon grass tea and then drink the swill. And something like Oliver Twist, you couldn't ask for a new set. I was a cool hippy but this seemed beyond the Lantana. And anyhow what was a Sesshin?

One evening in front of a fire at my home Tony and Gilly explained how to sit in Zarzen. I kept my back straight. I could do this. I went with them the next week to the little cottage in Killara where Zen Buddhism was taking shape.



All I remember was how excruciatingly painful it was to sit, with my back straight for more than a single count to ten. I could never concentrate on my breath and I never got to ten. In some miraculous way my knees didn't explode.

Riding backwards on an ox, drunken and singing (if only)

Whose home was it at Killara?

How is it that one might keep coming back to something? Pain isn't always a turn off or a cue to turn away. Still I was a slow starter; occasionally and occasionally I would go along to Killara. Then the Zendo moved; somewhere else on the north shore; I forget, then another move and eventually to Annandale. One day I meet Tony and Maggie at the Coote's home.

The sky is vast without horizon

Once upon a time we would play volleyball after building sessions at Gorricks. On another occasion there was a cricket match when we zennies took on the Balmain teachers. A pitch was mown somewhere free of wombat holes and the verandah of the cottage served as the pavilion for both teams. The game seemed to take all day, that's what some of the women folk said.

Who won?

On other occasions it has rained very hard up Gorricks way. Not so many Easters ago the rain started falling on Good Friday night and by Sunday the creek was up close to the higher level of the road. We were sitting that morning, the rain pelting down when at the door to the Zendo a women appeared, her clothes all topsy-turvy. Her skirt was hitched up to be were her knickers should have been while her knickers were stretched around her knees. She cried in a desperate way and we all ran after her down to the crossing. There, half submerged was the Toyota, the driver still trying to steer. With ropes and grunting we got it out. Then we went back to our sitting.

When we returned during the rest break they had gone. It's hard to stop a Toyota.

The ancestor does not appear or disappear

Once upon a time I was up among the Black Wattle behind the Zendo cottage and I saw a women walk by on her way to the showers. She had her hair held high on her head and kept in place with chopsticks. This was the first time I had set eyes on Subhana. Once too, I was talking to Gilly sitting on the verandah and said that during the night I'd seen a white horse galloping across the paddock, was it a dream? Oddly she had seen it too. I often dream at Gorricks, mostly during sittings.

The River of Stars flows pure

On every occasion I have got to Zen by car, I have never taken a bus or used a bicycle. Kerry on the other hand, during a very wet time, walked, together with others from the weir crossing into Kodoji. She said it took about an hour.

Apparently there are three sorts of Zen students. There are 'the best', they, it seems have resolutely given up worldly relationships and seek only their true natures, whatever that is. Then there are those who find distraction appealing and prefer to read books about Zen. The least admired Zen students seem to have an appetite for the Buddha's spit, which somehow eclipses the light of their true natures. That's one in the eye for you!

I have been practicing the Hans Heysen Asana for many years now and I still sway slightly as I stretch up like a gum tree. I carry a handkerchief to wipe off the spittle.



Attributions: Visuals on pages 24 – 29

	1 0	
Konstantin Brancusi	Newborn	22
Xu Bing	Seedling Field	24
Cai Guoqiang	Drawing for transient rainbow	26
Hakuin Ekaku	Blind men crossing a bridge	27
Cy Twombly	Three studies from the Temeraire (detail)	28
Qi Baishi	Lotus	29
Cover Images		
Anonymous	Buddha figure from SZC altar, Annandale	

Anonymous Bodhidharma Sengai Deshan Hakuin Ekaku Self portrait

Anonymous Robert Aitken and Anne Hopkins-Aitken

Sesshin photographs Subhana Barzaghi transmission; Gillian Coote transmission; Easter sesshin 2006

20 Years with Sydney Zen Centre

Caroline Josephs

In 1965 I was reading Krishnamurti with a few friends. The talks intrigued me ... I wasn't sure what they meant.

While in the UK in 1967 I arranged to visit Amsterdam, where Krishnamurti was to be giving a talk. There I met some Dutch students through a Canadian girl I was travelling with. Gerrit was one of them, and he was on his way to India as a Canadian volunteer after spending time at university in Canada. In late 1967 I visited India, intending to stay 10 days, and visit Gerry. He was staying in Chandigarh, teaching in schools and living with an Indian family where the father was a guide for the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. I stayed with the family, learned to meditate, was given a mantra. And before long, found myself speaking to 400 devotees in Amritsar about my



experiences with Transcendental Meditation! In 1968 I returned to Sydney and married. Family life and work took over for ten years.

I found Zen through John Cooper. We worked on a project together in Arts Education in the days when he was at the Australia Council for the Arts and I worked Canberra coordinating a national Education and Arts project. My marriage had It was 1979 and I was just dissolved. searching. John suggested I read The Three Pillars of Zen by Phillip Kapleau. I walked out of his office and straight to the nearby Adyar bookshop, bought, and devoured the book. I recall thinking, 'This is for me.'

Later, I attended John's meditation and orientation group in his home at Hunter's Hill. Inspired, three of us (the third a woman who had been briefly in Hawaii) set up a sitting group, moving between our homes in Canberra, buying in audiotapes of Roshi's *teishos*, and the newsletters of the Honolulu Women's group from Hawaii, as well as setting up a small library of books.

Eventually we organised and advertised a regular sitting group. We cleared the living room and bought numbers of *zafus* and *zabutons*. Many people came through the door. Twice a week we sat together, doing *kinhin* in our large garden. Twice I sat with Geoff Dawson and Paul Maloney for 3-day sesshins at Lindfield. It felt like a kind of torture and I wondered why I kept going back to zazen. After about two years the group fell apart as people dispersed. Eventually I moved back to my original home town of Sydney again after an absence of 15 years.

At the Harold Park Hotel I met Gilly Coote at an Aboriginal Writers' night and subsequently started sitting at Annandale. I also had begun to sit with Siddha Yoga at Dulwich Hill ashram. For about two years I went to Sydney Zen Centre for the strong *zazen*, and to Siddha Yoga for the vibrant chanting.

After meeting Gurumayi at a 3000-strong retreat in Melbourne, I gravitated towards Zen. That was about 1989 or 1990. Gradually I began to do 7-day retreats with John Tarrant Roshi, and later with Subhana Barzarghi as she became Roshi. I became a member of SZC. Over the years, I visited Hawaii three times for *Rohatsu*, attending the 40-year celebration there and once staying also for a week on the Big Island with Roshi and Tom and a small group of practitioners, on the lava that formed the foundation for Roshi's house. Nearby were hot springs where we could swim and waves where we could see the turtles surfing!

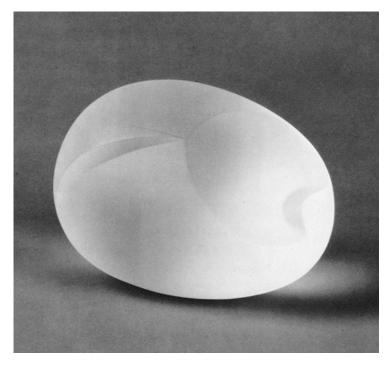
I have been a member of the SZC's Women group over the 20-year period, been a practice leader, regularly written and provided photos for *Mind Moon Circle* (and edited it a few times), done countless samus building the dojo at Gorrick's, done leadership roles at sesshin and evening zazen, given talks, run creative workshops,

helped to organise an Art Exhibition and sale, oriented about 90 newcomers, attended Transmissions for Ross Bolleter, and for Subhana. contributed to fund-raisings, provided about twenty or more documented albums of photographs of SZC's sesshins, activities and events. A rich and varied involvement in the Sangha and its activities and retreats. Friendships have been carved and sustained over the years.

Recently my two younger grand-children, Zoe and Ben, with their parents, Abi (my daughter) and her husband, Mark, attended a very joyous Baby Naming at the zendo.

It has been an intense learning time. The Dharma continues to intrigue and draw.

I am grateful to Robert Aitken Roshi for having established this Sangha in the West. For having



having given us so much – the subtlety, the nuances from a scholar, the commitment to ongoing embodiment of the practice. To think that half a century has passed in this journey. Wondrous teachings. Deep gassho to all who keep the practices alive!



Phone Zen Philip Long

Early in 1988, I found myself on my hands and knees on the lounge room floor of our house in Paddington in floods of tears and crying out: 'All my dreams have gone.' In December, 1987, I had experienced a sudden increase in severity of a condition I had been suffering from since 1981 and eventually diagnosed as M.E. (myalgic encephalomyelitis) or latterly CFS (chronic fatigue syndrome). The first onset was in August, 1981, and there had been a significant downturn in late 1985.

The change in 1987 was so severe I had to cease working. The incident on the lounge room floor was the emotional low point of the whole journey. I was overwhelmed by flu like symptoms, gastro-intestinal disturbances, skeletomuscular problems and neurological and psychological symptoms, including depression and extreme anxiety. My whole body and mind was devastated and there seemed nothing left to cling to.

I was visiting a psychiatrist at the time and even he was at a loss as to how do deal with the high levels of anxiety I was suffering from. During the day, I often needed desperately to rest but could not lie still for more than a few minutes. At night I could only get to sleep by taking a strong tranquiliser to which I had become

addicted. My psychiatrist decided to get me to try meditation and handed me a tape featuring the rather drone

like voice of a colleague of his.



I had practiced a self designed relaxation technique since around 1970 but with the onset of the illness this had fallen by the wayside. Around the same time as I took up this technique I had started to read a lot of books on psychotherapy, particularly on the radical fringe of the field (Fritz Perls, R. D. Laing, etc). I had started psychotherapy in an attempt to come to terms with the fact that I was gay (in those days homosexual or camp) and the reading was an attempt to understand the psychotherapeutic process (and probably to subvert it). One or two of these books mentioned a thing called Zen and eventually I ended up reading some of Alan

Watts' writings. I bought a book by D. T. Suzuki but could not make head or tail of it and put it aside. What I took from this very limited reading on Zen was that it basically involved 'letting it all hang out' and 'following your instincts', in other words some kind of freedom or liberation. No-one had mentioned meditation.

When I took up meditation I decided to week period my anxiety levels had meditation for a good 30 minutes. Over droning voice and gradually I began to myself to the kind of peace of mind that waiting for a plane flight to Melbourne old school, Saint Aloysius College at school colleague of mine who had there. I had won prizes at school for priests at the school, including the chap would join the order. Suddenly, and at



give it a good go for 6 weeks. At the end of the 6 dropped significantly and I could lie still in the next few months I got to hate that tape and the look for something better. I decided to dedicate I felt Buddhists practiced. One day at the airport to visit my in-laws, I met a Jesuit priest from my Milson's Point, and he began to ramble on about a joined the Jesuit order and was doing very well Religious Knowledge and I knew that a number of I was now speaking with, had high hopes that I great surprise to myself as much as to the priest, I

said: 'I have decided to become a Buddhist'. The exclamation went right over the head of the priest and he babbled on as if I had said nothing at all.

But the exclamation crystallised my intention to improve my meditation. I thought to myself: 'The Buddhists have been doing it for 2,500 years. Their meditation will be rock solid'. I decided to go for Zen Buddhism; I'm not really sure why. Was it my earlier reading of Watts, etc; was it some kind of inner instinct that it was right for me? Perhaps it was that idea of freedom. I really don't know. How to go about it? In those days there was no Google so I decided to look Zen up in the phone book and there it was: 'Zen Centre, Sydney'.

Turning up one evening at the Zendo, I was given instruction and shown the way to the Dojo. The first thing that

struck me was that there was an altar, bells and incense. 'Oh, my goodness,' I thought, 'It's a religion'. This was something of a problem for me, because I had left the Catholic Church around 1970 and professed a kind of atheistic psychologism for the next 19 years. I only wanted to learn how to meditate, not to get involved with another religion. I suppose I thought of Buddhism and Zen as not being religions in any true sense. Over time I changed my mind on all these matters.



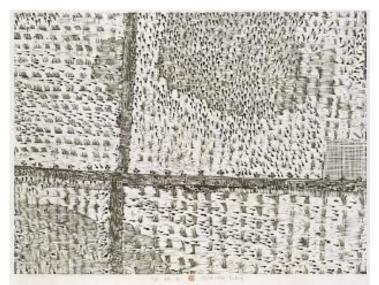
The second thing I noticed, over the next few weeks, was that meditating with others was much more powerful than doing so alone. After a few months I had gone completely off all medication and my meditation went very deep. On one occasion on a bus going down City Road I had a profound experience which confirmed my faith in the Buddhist way. Paradoxically, when in the middle of the experience, I exclaimed 'Oh, this is what people mean by God'. I had come full circle and recalled the words of my mother when I announced that I would no longer be attending mass: 'You'll come back one day, I know it'. Perhaps so; I was back at my beginning but it was a very different place.

Mysteries glimpsed in the Rear-Vision Mirror

Sally Hopkins

Stories are just stories, so there are multiple possible accounts. How did I come to Sydney Zen Centre? I'd say, pure chance. I was not searching. There could have been other outcomes. Things came together and, as it happened, I'm here.

There had been a time of desperate searching after failed beliefs, a failed marriage, a failed job, general disintegration; though I could put on a good face, I was going mad, my right arm strangling me. I found Primal therapy, a self practice that, I think the theory was, aimed to unite thoughts and feelings that had been separated by trauma. I practiced continually for 16 years, and a great deal opened up. I experienced just how much of the present is distorted by my own ideas and feelings that come from the past. I learned that life unfolds continually, generously, and that fundamentally, all is well whatever happens. I'd read some zen poems, and Allan Watts,



been to a Chinese exhibition where there was a little bamboo hut that I'd like to live in. But I had no real interest in the practice.

In 1989 we were farming on the Great Divide surrounded by Wollemi National Park, intimate with weather and seasons, the ways of animals and growing plants. Day followed day, full and ever changing. I was never really lonely, though the nearest shop was 40 miles away, and farming friends miles off. Farming friends who had lived their lives on, or near, the mountain were 'of the earth': wonderfully practical, wise, full of stories of a fence built, horses hard to catch, rabbit skins, dingoes, a year of fires, or rain, or drought, the potato

crop that brought riches. But some things could not be shared. I was leaning towards meeting some people of like mind. I was not looking for a practice.

At that point there was a talk on the ABC with Phra Khantipalo. He said, 'The energy of anger can be used for good purposes.' Yes, I knew that was true. This led to my going down the mountain to Wat Buddha Dhamma for a weekend, where I was taught how to meditate; a simpler, more socially adaptable process than my previous practice. So I changed practices and have meditated ever since.

In 1990 I went once more. Things were falling apart there. Someone who was moving into the Sydney Zen Centre wanted a few bits of furniture taken to Annandale. I, with my little blue truck, offered to deliver them, as I was to visit my son near by. At Annandale there was a very warm welcome, and an invitation to sit with them whenever I was down visiting my children. So I did. Zen? Therevada? What difference?

1992: the Zen Women held a retreat at Gorricks. 'Singing and Dancing are the voice of the Law'. I loved singing. Looking for song, companionship, not the Dharma, I went. The women were wonderfully genuine. The language was different, but beneath the language, something wordless was alive. I felt 'at home'. It seemed I was a Zen student, if there had to be a name.

1996: Colin's father in Sydney phoned, 'Mum's fallen backwards in the bath. Come!' So we went, and never returned. Through the stressful years that followed, family in Sydney and Melbourne growing more feeble, less able to cope, dying, it was wonderful to be sitting with all, not from afar, but right here in the Annandale zendo.

2002: We came even closer to SZC. My mother-in-law went into care, and we moved into the room above the dojo. There we remain.

Though I did not think I was coming for the Dharma, I have been gifted with this rich wonderful tradition that we all hold for those to come. I am grateful for this straightforward, down to earth, subtle, demanding practice: most grateful for the presences, the pointings, of teachers present, and past, formal teachers, and sangha members. The open-ended little bamboo hut was speaking all along. Thank you all.



How did you ...? Carl Hooper

And the master said, 'How did you come to Zen?'

The question sounded innocent enough, And sensing the hurdle, but not the water-trap, With muscles blind I rashly made my jump.

And the master said, 'How did you come to Zen?'

There was a mango tree, I blurted out, And guavas growing by an old tin shed, A water tank, an ill kept lawn behind.

And the master said, 'How did you come to Zen?'

Behind my aunty's weathered boarding house, Some empty paddocks, railway tracks, The old complaint of the sawmill saws.

And the master said, 'How did you come to Zen?'

And there was the sky, the blue of the sky, That empty winter sky, and a boy of ten Struck suddenly silent, solitary, still.

And the master said, 'How did you come to Zen?'

Invocation Clinton Smith

Far west of the sunset and beyond all forgiving is an island, an inner island. It has no name.

It's ramparts are so steep, a thought begins a landslide. I has air so pure, the body fills with wonder; stars so bright, the soul cries out.

This place asks all. mountaineers find no handhold. Travellers are stripped of comfort and reduced to bones. No compromise survives this almost impenetrable land. Description is dumb and the heart amazed.

Here is no progress, future, past. No god, hope, goodness, warmth. Just the pain of an emptiness too passionate to bear. Here all masks fall. All opinions are exposed. All possessions become vapour. All human love is tinsel.

This land of passionate dispassion has unimaginable riches. People who find it are considered mad. Its austerity is nectar. Each moment there is death.

Who dares face the sunset and begin?

Who dares?

Who dares?

Coming home

Jean Brick

In retrospect, that glorious summer of 1988 seems doomed. As usual in Beijing before industry and traffic turned the air thick, the summer skies were high and blue, the cicada song intense, the lakes in Beihai full of lotus. Water melons were piled high along the footpaths and the air was heavy with the scent of peaches and hot earth. But on the buses and sitting chatting under street lights on those long summer nights, people worried about rapidly rising prices, and what would happen when, as rumoured, the government stopped guaranteeing jobs and subsidising housing.

Meanwhile, sitting in the roof-garden of the Friendship Hotel drinking Qingdao beer, I was reading Feng Youlan's *History of Chinese Philosophy*. So it was from the pen of a decidedly positivist nascent neo-Confucian that I came across Hua Yen and the net of Indra for the first time and was enchanted.

Later that summer I set off for Wutaishan, abode of Manjusri, and one of the four great, and at that time forgotten, Buddhist mountains in China. It was then a quiet upland valley full of dilapidated temples being

brought back to life by young monks from China's vast rural hinterland. I wandered from temple to temple, and Manjuri was always there to greet me, sword raised high. It must have been around the forth day, when I was back at my favourite temple bowing for the umpteenth time, that a middle-aged monk approached me. 'What are you looking for?' he asked. 'What do you want?' What indeed? I didn't know. But I knew there was something important to be found, and later that afternoon, thinking about his question while sitting on an open hillside high up the valley, I decided I had to do something about it. I was committed to another year in China, but after that I'd go back to Australia and find a group and a teacher.

So I went to Shanghai and moved into the student dormitory and studied Chinese while the tiny cloud of fear on last summer's horizon grew and swelled and grew again until it burst in red ruin over Tiananmen and dozens of other cities. The tide swept me



back to Sydney and into a black pit where I thrashed for two and a half years, causing great suffering to myself and to those around me. Then on December 29th 1991 at approximately 10.30 in the morning the pit closed as if it had never been and I found myself standing in the sunshine thinking, 'What's next?'

It took me another 18 months to find my way to the zendo. I still didn't know what I was looking for, but I had a good idea of what I wasn't, having found it in quite a number of groups round Sydney. But one day Gilly gave a talk on Zen at Macquarie University, and though I missed it, (I as teaching), I did manage to get the address, and within a week I was sitting on a cushion facing the wall at Annandale. And I knew, with absolute and complete certainty, that this was it. I was home. I could get started. Now. Luckily, there was an intensive retreat coming up - sesshin, it was called, and so I put my application in, explaining as I did so that I would have to leave for one day because I had to give a paper. At a conference. But I would come straight back. It would be fine.

It wasn't fine. Maggie rang me. She was polite and patient and infinitely compassionate but the only way I was going to get to that sesshin was by going full time. My memory is of logic, of pleading, of complete conviction that I could leave in the middle of sesshin and return a day later without any ill effects. Her memory is of argument and anger. She is right of course, both about the anger and about the undesirability of a complete

newcomer leaving in the middle of her first sesshin to return 24 hours later. But I didn't know it then. So, a couple of weeks later when Gilly, all unawares, asked me how I was going, I took her nose off. 'I need a teacher,' I said. Snapped. Barked. 'I need a teacher'. 'Well', she said, 'Why don't you go to Rohatsu in Hawaii.' Rohatsu, it turned out, was an eight day retreat ... a Great Sesshin ... the longest of the year. I had the plane ticket within 24 hours. Sesshin acceptance come a little later. Meanwhile, Maggie reeled away from that telephone conversation mauled and bloody to report a fierce woman to Subhana.

And so, a few weeks later, I was lying on a mattress on the floor in one of the dormitories at the newly constructed Palolo Zen Centre, a centre so new that this was the first sesshin held there. I lay there, looking at the shadowy ceiling, with a feeling of deep content and quiet triumph. I had made it. Finally. The journey, whatever it was, could begin. And eight days later, lying on that same mattress, I knew that nothing would ever be the same again.



How I got here

Brian Gutkin

No satellite navigators then, You couldn't goggle Buddhism/Zen.

I came from the North, Manly, Needing to know how I got here. I cannot recall the year, But the Ino was Steven Crump, And I believe I once saw David Engelbrecht in full regalia

Floral dress and handbag; or was it just a dream.

You will find him now at Gorricks, On the way down to the creek, When the Jiki takes you walking, A black pole in the ancient ground, 'Harbour Star', alive or dead, Who can say?

The Great Way is simple, just ask Telstra. Is there Zen in Sydney? Yes, living, in Annandale. Clutching a Gregory's, I came by car, the five Skandha's. No 'Ho', 'Ho' on anyone then.

It was Jean who greeted me inside, Just as she did last week, Restive, enthused, smiling, alive, Genuine, I liked it. Sitting, wrapped by the silence, Remembering when I was last here.

I came because of Kerouac's 'Dharma Bums', Inspired by Hesse's 'Siddhartha' And a beat-up copy of Conze's 'Buddhist Meditation' Stolen from a Dublin store, And despite Christmas Humphries 'A Western Approach to Zen' That truly set me back, twenty years.

Born again, Qi Gong and Chinese Herbs, just in the nick of time,

I suddenly remembered I had always wanted to do Zen,

Years ago, when I was still alive. It is because I got here, Crossing the water from north to south, That I am still here, right now.







From There to Here Larry Agriesti

Some people are born in Australia, some arrive by airplane, some by boat; I arrived by observing my breath. How is this so?

Living as a gay man in San Francisco during the 1970s, I was caught up in the madness of delusive thinking; too much sex, drugs, and rock and roll. I was deeply unhappy and a friend recommended a course on personal development that might help. On the first night of the course, the instructor told us to close our eyes, sit comfortably in our chairs, and focus on our breath without judging it; just watch it come and go. What? This is pure nonsense I thought, and confronted my friend with my objections. I wanted a rational explanation before I continued. Well, he said, if you are so smart Larry, why haven't you figured out how to get out of your misery by now? Just do the program; stick with it!



And so I did. After time I noticed some amazing

things. I could observe thoughts and feelings without reacting. I felt calmer. I was able to distinguish between what was actually going on in my life, and the artificial world and consequences of drugs and denial. I began taking full responsibility for myself. I began to work with what I had; not with what I wished I had.

A year later, some 25 years ago, I arrived in Sydney with \$1,000 in my pocket and no ticket home. I had never been here before. I had no job. I did have my meditation practice. Within 6 months I had a job, a partner, and was enrolled in graduate school. Life was good. Very good. So I decided I didn't need to practice meditation any more.

Fifteen years later I was in hell again. Ooops. I was in a painful, deceitful relationship with my partner of all those years. I was being lied to and felt unable to face the truth and what it would mean; what I would have to do. And then one afternoon staring at the sky in my beautiful backyard, I remembered the last time I felt strong; able to take charge and do what I could to change a very unpleasant situation: it was when I was meditating, seeing things for exactly what they are and, where possible, doing what I could to improve my circumstances.

So I reached for the phone book, called the Sydney Zen Centre, and spoke with Tony Coote, who encouraged me to visit. When I arrived, Jean Brick gave me an orientation and a few minutes later I was on the mat. Whew!

Several months later I was able to walk away from my partner and begin living an honest life; no more delusive thinking, no more denial, no more pretending or wishful thinking.

For the past ten years I have continued my practice, helped by all the wonderful people at the centre. Truly, committing myself to mediation practice is probably the smartest thing I've ever done. It is priceless, and I am so grateful to the Sydney Zen Centre for all the support and guidance they have given. Life is good. Very good.



Getting here

Jonathon Case

I arrived at the Sydney Zen Centre in April 2005, really not knowing what to expect but knowing I needed to learn to meditate. I had long be curious about Japan, Buddhism and Zen in particular, but hadn't had the ... what? ... the fortitude? to really dive into it. Browsing my bookshelf I find many books on Japan and Buddhism dating from the late 70s and early 80s: Peter Mattheisen (*Snow Leopard, Nine-headed Dragon River*), Oliver Statler (*A Japanese Pilgrimage*), Yasunari Kawabata's works, Basho's haiku amongst them. My copy of DT Suzuki was purchased in the mid-80s; *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* slightly later, but it always seemed that the Zen way of understanding was beyond me. This made me feel a

bit foolish; I mean, how hard can this stuff really be? Surely I'm not that dumb that I can't understand it? I was stuck in the mind-road mire, trying to rationally think Zen through. I think I was intimidated by this.

In the few months before I found the Zen Centre, I had experienced one of those not-so-pleasant crises that we may fall into. I was working in a high-pressure job for a US company, and the 24x7 'lifestyle' was steadily breaking down my physical and emotional health. It reached a point where in January I had been forced onto extended medical leave so I could recover. Part of my recovery was to attend relaxation classes with a wonderful person who happened to have previously been a Buddhist nun. After completing my relaxation course, and drawing on the several discussions on Buddhism and meditation I'd also had with this person, I searched the web and found an article by Subhana comparing and contrasting Vipassana and Zen meditation. A short e-mail exchange followed between us and I decided to step off the cliff and seek experience in meditation first-hand.

Eventually, after a mis-direction to a Tibetan Buddhist group called the 'Diamond Way', I turned up at the SZC for an introduction by Kim McShane (a fellow escaped Tasmanian!), who guided me through the basics of Zen meditation. With the usual aching knees and neck I proudly 'survived' my first 2-hour sit, and knew that this is what I had been seeking.

I have approached Zen by studiously avoiding too much studying. I have always found it too easy and enjoyable to immerse myself in a topic, wanting to learn as much as I can; rationally absorbing all I could read on a topic. But this seemed to be self-defeating for the reasons I was there in the first place; and clearly from previous experience, Zen is not something that can be learned like a school or university subject.

Zen meditation became an intermittent part of my life. Almost every Monday evening 7--9pm I would turn up at SZC and sit for 2 hours, completely unsure and partly unwilling to 'progress' further or deeper into the Zen experience. It was also relatively easy to find small gaps in my day where I could grab a few minutes of Zen peace and breath, and this was a pleasant source of clarity and relaxation in my then still-hectic workdays. I have tried to be stubbornly patient and not seek to 'push' forward for the sake of achievement of some sort. I attended a part Sesshin in December 2005, but it wasn't until Autumn Sesshin 2009 I was able to attend a full 7-day Sesshin and now realise what a wondrously different experience it is to do this. Meditation is now much more a part of my daily routine and I am better for it. I rise around 5am and sit for a while before exercising and the before family awakes. I am, by the measure of those I sit with, still a very new-comer to the Sydney Zen Centre.

Every day I strive to become even more a new-comer to Zen.

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Distant thunder,
The thirsty creek can welcome spring time's precious gifts

Leigh Davison