



*Celebrating
forty years of
Zen in Sydney.*

SUMMER 2016

Celebrating 40 years of Zen in Sydney

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Cover: Ameli Tanchitsa

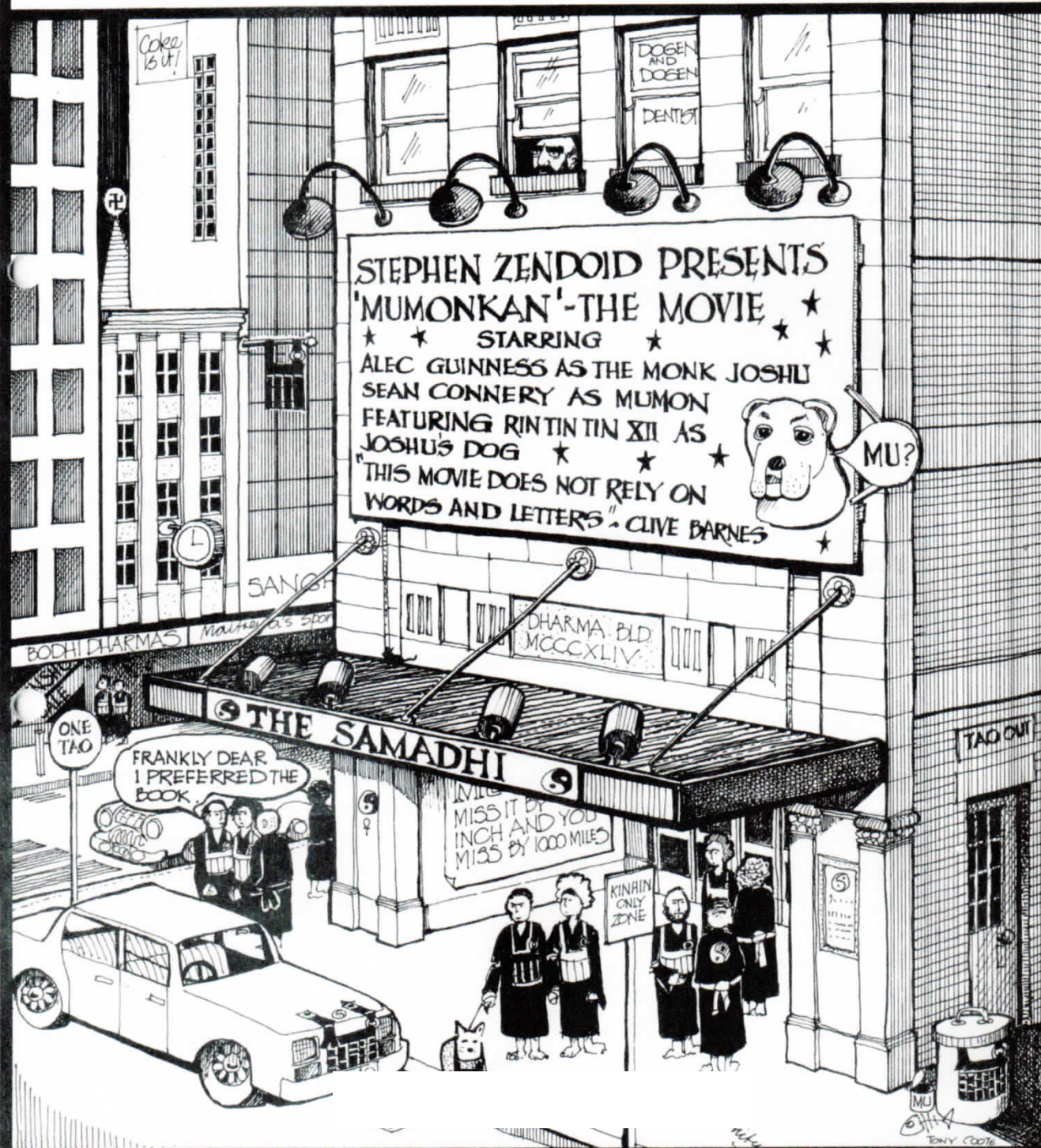
Editor: Brendon Stewart

The next issues of *Mind Moon Circle* (Autumn 2016). 'Sounds Of Sangha' ... maybe there is a song or sound that's inspired your practice, or sung you on your journey; or a song *from the cushion* that's emerged out of your practice; or one that keeps coming to mind whenever you sit, what's it trying to teach you? Then there's musical tinnitus, frogs, cicadas, the tock or the clack of something, maybe nothing special; or your favourite sound, chant, hymn, anthem, genre, liturgy write and share it with Sangha in this edition. Send your stories to Brian Gutkin by early April 2016. bjgutkin@bigpond.com

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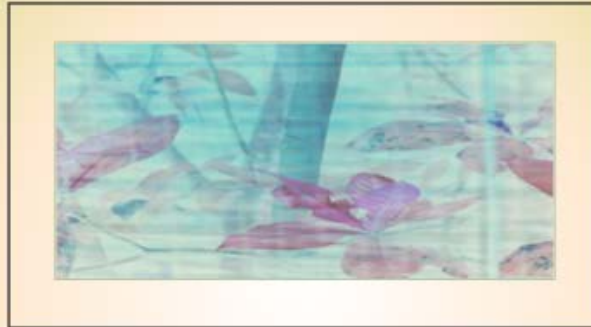
Summer 2016

Tony Coote's
Autumn '88

Sydney Zen Sangha is celebrating our

40TH ANNIVERSARY

10^{AM} SUNDAY 15TH NOVEMBER 2015



Pat Brunton Hall, Crows Nest Community Centre, 2 Ernest Place, Crows Nest
Free parking in the parking station adjacent to Community Centre
www.crowsnestcentre.org.au



WHAT TO BRING

- Mat & cushion/stool for zazen & sutra ceremony
- Plate to share for vegetarian lunch, non-alcoholic beverage
- We are assembling photos and messages to help frame our group sharing and history. Please bring photos and stories of the past and/or send them to Kerry Stewart (jpeg – small format size please)



PROGRAM

10am Zazen, Sutra ceremony; 11am Group sharing; 1pm Lunch;
3pm Departure

RSVP

You and your kids are welcome to attend all or part of the event.
Please let Kerry Stewart know: stewartkerry4@gmail.com

In November 2015 The Sydney Zen Centre organised an anniversary to celebrate 40 years of Zen Buddhist practice in Sydney and quite possibly here in Australia. Zen Buddhist ideas were undoubtedly in the minds of many women and men in the years before 1975. It was in this year a group of people set in motion the journey that has led to several Zen sanghas across this wide brown land.

This edition of Mind Moon Circle is composed of stories from people who were there in the early years and then more stories follow that tell of the formation of Sydney Zen Centre and our wonderful Sangha today.

Dear Sydney Sangha,

I'm feeling very close to you today and send my heartfelt congratulations to all on the 40th anniversary of the Sydney Zen Sangha. It seems not so long ago that I accompanied Aitken Roshi to Sydney to serve as Tanto for Sydney Zen Centre's first sesshin, and I believe the first sesshin in Australia. It was 1979, just four years after a small group of friends began doing zazen together. There were around thirty of us at that inaugural sesshin, a number of whom are still practicing members of the sangha, others who have passed away, and some who are now Zen Roshis.

I recently came across an essay Aitken Roshi wrote around the time of that first Australian sesshin titled *The Lay Zen Buddhist Sangha in the West*. In the essay Rōshi notes:

As a completely lay organization, the Diamond Sangha faces a number of special challenges. With staff limited to volunteers and two part-time paid employees at one of its six centers, the continuity of the teaching, the cultivation of leadership, and the maintenance of schedule and facilities all are at risk, for the organization is almost entirely dependent on the time and energy its members can afford to take from their families, careers, and education. Members seem to strike a balance between personal responsibilities and responsibilities to the temple without too much difficulty, ...

Well, congratulations all of you. You've been operating quite marvellously in this risk zone now for forty years! With earnest and voluntary zazen practice at the core of the organization, you have managed to continue weekly zazen practice meetings and sesshin year after year, collect donations and balance the books, build and maintain your beautiful country zendo, and even produce some excellent new teachers — all entirely dependent on the time and energy your members can afford to take from their families, careers, and education. It's really quite remarkable isn't it? What an astonishing and efficacious practice!

Congratulations and love to all!
Michael Kieran
Honolulu Diamond Sangha

**The weather moves above us and
here we are**
Sally Hopkins

Two and a half thousand, one thousand.
five hundred-
40 years, 40 weeks, 40 seconds....
sun, stars, clock , heart time.....
Someone sat under a tree
and clearly SAW- at that moment- A STAR.
And truly seeing, everything flowed from that-
no name, no “Buddhism”, no number of years-
but a WAY, a freedom, to be tested and tried
by those who came after.
40 years now since a few sat here,
testing for themselves with their lives
what he found-
and so here we sit
because of those few,
because of the man under the tree,
because of all who followed after him...
Let us open our eyes, our ears, heart and mind,
Let the whole world enter-
while ideas of “Buddhism” “40 years”
“THE Right path” “ME” float away...
May we wake up to this moment
in gratitude to all our many guides before...
so we in our turn
can pass the treasure on.

A Reflection on the early years

Leigh Davison

I have a photo of our first sesshin outside of Dungog held over the Easter weekend in 1978. About a dozen of us drove up from Sydney on the Thursday evening through heavy rain and set ourselves up in an old dairy shed. The roof leaked copiously, it rained all weekend and we were cut off from the outside world. There was no roshi, no teisho and none of the mealtime rituals that we now associate with sesshin. Nevertheless it was a step on the path to what we now know as the Sydney Zen Centre. Many of the participants in that first sesshin have played key roles in the development of the centre and some continue to do so.

But where did it all start?

In November 1975, having returned from an overseas trip where I had spent some time in a Zen centre in England and wishing to maintain a practice here I managed to connect with an initial seed sangha: Paul Maloney, Peter Thompson and Liz Statis. We had weekly sittings at my mother's house in East Lindfield until Stuart Glanfield and myself rented a house at 17 Norwood Avenue Lindfield with the aim of using it as a space for Buddhist meditation practice. We established weekly evening sittings and numbers slowly grew. One thing led to another and bimonthly zazenkais were instituted. These usually commenced on Saturday evenings and went through till late Sunday morning. We also had occasional Sunday events at John and Shirley Cooper's place at Hunters Hill.

Geoff Dawson moved into 17 Norwood Avenue after spending time sitting with Kabori Roshi in Kyoto. Geoff had a tape of a talk given by the American teacher, Robert Aitken Roshi and we decided to approach him with a view to making a long term connection. This is because it had become apparent that you can only go so far with a do-it-yourself approach to Zen practice. Aitken Roshi used to send us tapes which we would play at our zazenkais. But would he come to Australia and lead a sesshin here? Only if one or more of us went to Hawaii to make a personal connection.

So in due course Geoff and I flew out to the Maui Zendo to make that connection. That would have been in June 1978 just months after the Dungog sesshin. Patrick Kearney stepped in to run the show at 17 Norwood Avenue and with the help of Kim and Marion Bagot, Paul Maloney, John Cooper and others organised Aitken Roshi's initial sesshin in the Sydney region which must have been early in 1979 (??).

I got more than I bargained for in Hawaii. I went there hoping to get enlightened. Instead I got married. I brought Ellen back to Australia and we have lived here on our communal farm in northern NSW since 1979, managing to get away to sesshin when possible initially at Burradoo and then at Gorricks Run. We are both grateful to those of you who have kept the show on the road for so long. Thank you.



L to R: Robert Aitken Roshi, Marion Bagot, Kim Bagot, Sandy Dresden, Patrick Kearney, Paul Maloney, Michael Kieran

Robert Aitken Roshi – An Impression

Paul Maloney

The first contact our sangha had with Aitken Roshi came through Geoff Dawson, who incidentally we have to thank for finding Gorricks Run. Geoff wrote a letter to Aitken Roshi explaining who we were and what we were doing, and ask if he might consider visiting Sydney to teach a sesshin. Aitken Roshi was intrigued with what he saw as the unprecedented fact that our little sangha had been holding sesshin without a teacher. Even so, he was hesitant to come so far to a group that he did not know. What turned things around was the decision of Geoff, Leigh Davison, John Tarrant, and Susan Mercutt to go to Hawaii to practice with Aitken Roshi. His encounter with these “southern barbarians” convinced Roshi to come to Sydney for a closer look. And he seemed to like what he found, as he kept coming back. For one thing, he found our directness and irreverence appealing. He told a story against himself during the 40th anniversary celebrations of the Diamond Sangha in Hawaii, where some of us were privileged to attend. He recounted how, on his first visit to Sydney, Kim and Marion Bagot had taken him for a drive to the Blue Mountains. Kim stopped for petrol somewhere, and Aitken Roshi insisted that he should be allowed to pay for it. Kim remarked, in Kim’s inimitable way, “Typical Yank, comes over here and starts throwing his money around.” Aitken Roshi thought this to be very funny, which it was of course. In Australia, you know you have made a good friend when they start taking the piss.

Aitken Roshi first arrived in Australia in February 1979 and, in doing so, transformed our practice forever. His legacy is extensive encompassing as it does our zazenkai form, sutras, and sesshin schedule, to name but a few. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Michael Keiran who, at that time was one of Aitken Roshi’s senior students. Michael accompanied Aitken Roshi on most of his early visits to Australia, and acted as our tutor in dojo formality. In doing so Michael became a firm friend of many of us. Michael is now a Roshi in his own right, and inheritor of Aitken Roshi’s dharma seat in Hawaii.

I first meet met Roshi when he came to the Chinese Buddhist Temple in Dixon Street, where we had our weekly zazenkai in those days. The first impression was his ordinariness. If you were to pass him in the street, you would not give a second glance. Michael, many years later recounted, with some amusement, a telephone conversation he overheard, between Marion Bagot and someone else. Marion, when asked what Aitken Roshi was like, had replied, “He has dandruff.” There was nothing flamboyant about him. He was not the sort of person that you might find walking a public labyrinth wearing robes and rakusu. Nor, when he was making public protests against war and injustice, which he often did, would you see him wearing “identifiers” proclaiming he was a Buddhist. On such occasions, he was simply Bob Aitken, ordinary concerned citizen.

Aitken Roshi’s first sesshin started on Sunday 18 February, 1979, which happened to be my 40th birthday. And what a birthday it proved to be! After sitting alone for the most part for nine years, then with our little sangha for a further four years, I found for the first time a teacher with whom I had an affinity. It was, of course, a great learning experience for everyone involved. For most, it was their first sesshin, and for some even their first

encounter with Zen. In addition, we found ourselves on a steep learning curve, as Michael did his best to introduce us to the very detailed forms and rituals of a Diamond Sangha sesshin. The day started at 4.00 am and closed at 9.00 pm, and was constituted by zazen and kinhin relieved only by meals, samu and a short rest after lunch. Dokusan with Aitken Roshi became legendary. His energy was amazing, sometimes giving Dokusan to 30 or more people three times a day. His dokusan, I would describe as “dry” insofar as he eschewed psychological issues. This is not to say that it was all serious. Roshi could be very playful at times, depending on where the student was in their practice. His dokusan rarely lasted for more than a few minutes, often seeming as brief as 10 seconds! One hardly sat on the floor and given a response, when his bell would ring: time to go back to the dojo. Roshi’s way was to put the burden of work on the student, and to trust in the Dharma to show them the way. He once told me that when a student got stuck, as they often did of course, it took great courage on the part of the student to persevere and, he added, it took great courage on the part of the teacher. This was a valuable lesson that has stayed with me until today.

At one of our early sesshin we had sosan. I went up and my question was as follows:

“The Buddha said, ‘All beings by nature are Buddha, only their ignorance and attachments prevent them from realising this fact.’ Why then, I asked, is there ignorance rather than Awakening?” After some moments Aitken Roshi replied, “I don’t know.”

I said, “If you don’t know, why are you a Roshi?”

Aitken Roshi Replied, “Sometimes I feel inadequate.”

Upon reflection, I came to appreciate his response. There was something comforting in the ordinary humanity of someone who is sincerely walking Way of the Buddhadharma, and able and willing to selflessly guide others. It made me realize that it is possible for a broken vessel to hold some water. We don’t have to wait until we are perfect before reaching out to someone in need. It has been said that there are no extraordinary people, only ordinary people who do extraordinary things. Given that, I would count Robert Aitken as an ordinary person who truly did extraordinary things. We are honoured to have had him as our first teacher.

The Shower Queue

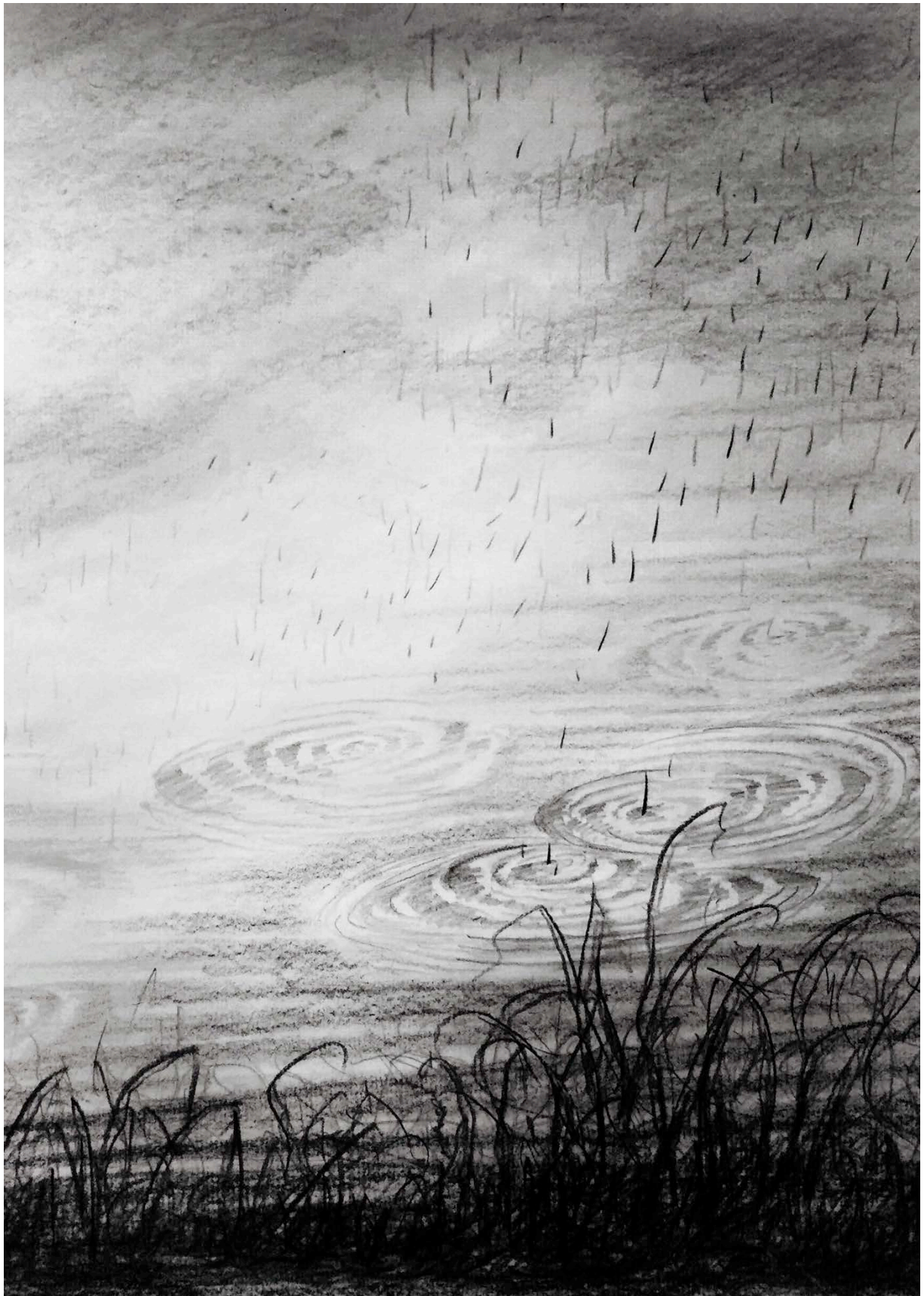
Tony Wheeler

Back in the early 1980's, some sesshin were held at the zendo in Lindfield. One of these was a sesshin with Aitken Roshi and Michael Keiran who was the tanto. Paul Maloney was also in a leadership role, jikki-jitsu, if I remember correctly.

In those days, when space and washing facilities were limited, there was a custom originating from the zendo in Hawaii, which deemed that when there was a queue for the shower, the one showering would not turn off the water when finished. This would enable the next person to enter the shower immediately without having to fiddle around with taps and waste precious time and water getting the temperature right. In the context of a crowded sesshin, this is a great idea.

One day during this particular sesshin, I was in the shower and Paul Maloney was waiting in line, due to be next in. In those days I was in the habit of finishing my showers with a completely cold rinse. Having had the cold rinse, I was reaching for the taps to readjust the temperature for Paul, when he called out, "Leave the water running! Don't turn it off!"

Sesshin, of course, is a silent retreat, so I was unable to launch into a detailed explanation of my intended tap work, so the only option was to hop out and dry myself. Meanwhile, Paul hopped straight in, only to find himself under a full stream of completely cold water. He didn't yell, shriek or even complain, but he did let out a heavy, shuddering "Oooff!" which seemed to shake the whole house.



Glenys Jackson

My Coming to Zen and the Formation of the Sydney Zen Centre

Peter Thompson

In 1975 at a Tibetan Buddhist party in Crows Nest Sydney I met Leigh Davison. He was to become a very important part of my life.

During my first year at ANU, I injured my back surfing and knocked all my front teeth out playing Rugby without a mouth guard. This is when I discovered and met the well known and respected ANU psychological counselor Margaret Evans, who was it seems a great mentor to many students. She pointed me in the direction of famous Zen loving Psychiatrist Eric Fromm ("The Art Of Loving") and Eric Fromm pointed me to D.T. Suzuki, Alan Watts and Zen - my Zen journey had begun and the rigid, rickety Catholicism that I grew up with slowly fell completely away.

I managed luckily to prolong my Arts/Law course at ANU for 5 years by failing certain subjects and was therefore able to spend most of my time in the Menzies Library reading and studying Zen; Alan Watts, D.T. Suzuki, Krishnamurti, Vimala Thakar. It had really been quite obvious from the beginning that I was enrolled in the wrong course but after a while that did not matter any more - Uni life provided the time to read and study the things I was really interested in and to learn deep relaxation (Dr Ainsley Meares - Mental Antaraxis) and TM (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi). My university life became one big spiritual and psychological enquiry for at least 3 years. Toward the end of this time the Jesuit priest Father William Johnston visited and was invited by old professor Basham of the Asian Studies Department to give a talk on Zen. Father Johnston walked in with a strange black cushion and sat down on the dais floor of the Auditorium. He took the meditation posture in silence and continued this for 5...10...15 minutes at least with the word / concept addicted audience growing more and more uneasy and unsettled. After what seemed like an eternity he finally broke his silence to explain that this was what was called Zen sitting or zazen. This was my first intro to Zen sitting practice.

As a benign and compassionate strategy to get me to finish my Arts Degree, my poor long-suffering mother promised to finance a trip to India in early 1975 (if I would complete the degree). Yes I did finally complete it and also take advantage of my mother's generosity. I was able to meet with J. Krishnamurti and Vimala Thakar in India.

Returning to that party - I can still see Leigh Davison standing there before me in his red turtle-neck woollen jumper. Paul Maloney was also there. Leigh briefly told me some of his Zen story and of his adventures in India, particularly the story of how he met the Zen monk Shibiya-san at the Japanese Temple which was one of a number of international temples in the Bodhgaya Complex. Before his encounter with Shibiya, Leigh had been studying Hindu yoga practices at the recommendation of Sydney yoga teacher John Cooper. In response to a question from Leigh about Zen, Shibiya-san replied:

Sit like The Buddha - Become like The Buddha

As we talked about sitting Zen, I also remember Leigh saying to me that we should not be

too ambitious in rushing to build a Zen group in Sydney. He said that it would have greater stability and strength if we let it build itself slowly, naturally and organically.

About a week later we had our first Zen sitting - Paul, Leigh and I at Leigh's mother's house in Brisbane Avenue, East Lindfield, where Leigh had been staying since his return from the subcontinent. After having done various meditation practices before this, I was still quite shell shocked by the high energy intensity of Zen sitting meditation and it was to take quite a lot of time over a number of years to adjust a little to this intensity. As far as we knew these were the first ever Zen sittings in Sydney. Soon after, our fledgling group welcomed a new member, the first female member Elizabeth (Liz) Statis. The four of us continued to sit for some time together in East Lindfield and later at other locations like the Chinese Buddhist Temple in Dixon Street, Chinatown.

When I first met Leigh I was living in Gladstone Parade, Lindfield and doing a Dip. ED. at Lindfield CAE (now UTS). After I finished this, I sought a break from what had been six continuous, laborious and joyless years of academic study. So I decided to become a postman in the Lindfield area. I was soon amazed again by fate - Zen would not leave me alone. Leigh and Stuart Glanfield had decided to set up a Buddhist shared meditation house in Norwood Ave, Lindfield just around the corner from where I was living and to top it off I was often placed on that postal beat to find myself delivering their mail. Even though I still found Zen practice difficult, I began to surrender a little and often found myself walking around the corner for a Zen sitting and sometimes for one of Leigh's well known "nothing special" dinners - wholesome fruit salad and yoghurt. After some time other now-familiar faces began to come to this first Zen house. One night Geoff Dawson appeared.

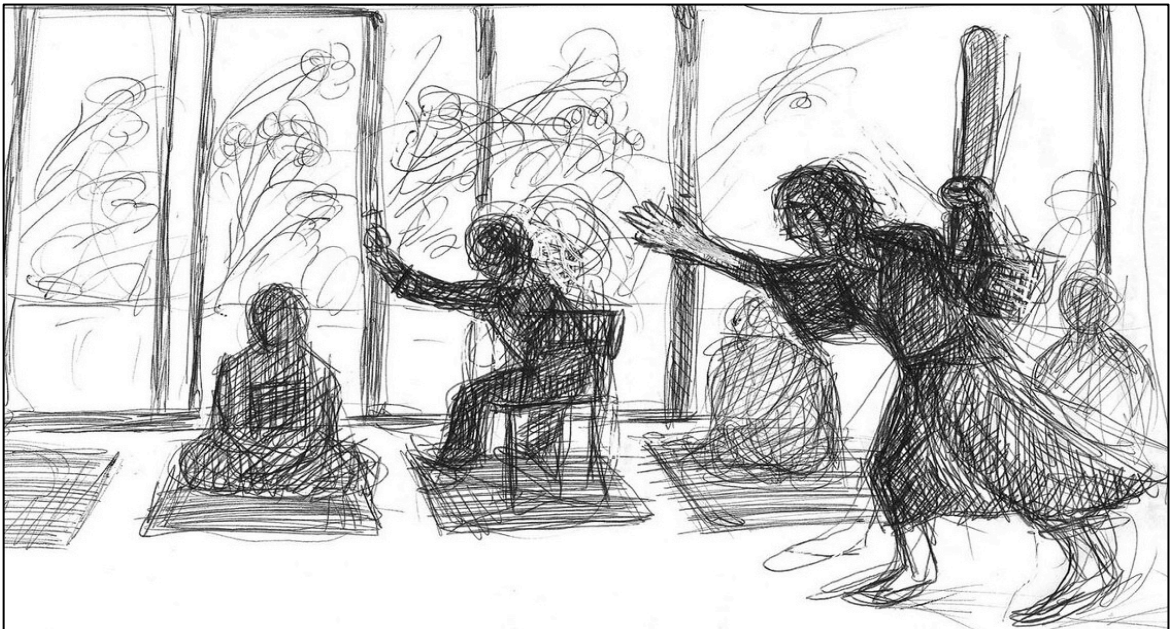
We were all in admiration of the great energy and dedication of Leigh during this period. He was holding down a challenging job at the uni, leading sitting practice in the Zen house, writing, editing and publishing a new Zen newsletter/magazine called "Nothing Special" and organising Zen retreats in the country (Dungog and Lismore) all by himself. He was also carrying on a vigorous correspondence with several distant people who were very interested in pursuing Zen practice. The Sydney Zen Centre owes a great deal to the tireless foundation work of Leigh Davison. It was mainly through Leigh's groundwork (as well as that of Geoff Dawson) that Robert Aitken consented to come and visit to teach in Australia. After an incredible and exhausting year of spiritual seeking in India in 1978 with Sri Rajneesh, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj and Vimala Thakar, I was ready to return and turn inward. Soon after that I found myself asking Aitken Roshi for the great mind-dissolving Koan, Mu. He obliged me happily, warning that it was a tough medicine for a wandering hippie like myself!

Hand to hand

Sue Bidwell

Those before us
left signposts,
showed the Way,
by hammering nails,
preparing food,
mowing grass,
sitting, walking, working.
Not wobbling.

May we all continue
to find a way
to show the Way
with equal attention
and resolve
and strength
and laughter.
Not wobbling*
(* with a nod to Lin Chi)



Janet Selby, what happens when you wobble (or “*Close the window, the wind is too strong*”).

Never Stops Flowing – the River of Sangha

Gillian Coote

In 1980, a little further up this river, Tony and I met Aitken Roshi through our friends John and Shirley Cooper. John was our yoga teacher, a great bear of a man with a huge laugh and a wide knowledge of Hinduism and Buddhism. In those days, he worked for the Australia Council, and at the end of each class, after twenty minutes meditation, he'd let us know about some interesting person visiting Sydney. One evening he casually mentioned that a Zen master was visiting, and invited anybody who cared to come to his place to meet him. We'd encountered various Indian teachers over the years and expected a charismatic guru-type of person dressed like a samurai, but there was nobody like that in John and Shirley's upstairs dojo. Maybe the Zen master hadn't arrived yet?

Then Roshi stepped forward out of the shadows to say a few words about sesshin and to encourage people to come. He was a shy, scholarly man, wearing a checked shirt and baggy jeans. He spoke quietly, and his words inspired trust in the Way, in the Dharma. Tony went off to his first-ever 7-day sesshin the following week and came back with shining eyes, extolling the virtues of oryoki. From then on we sat regularly with other Zen students in Sydney. Roshi came once each year for sesshin, in the beginning with Michael Kieran, and later with Roshi's beautiful wife, Anne.

Inspired by Gary Snyder, who was on an Australia Council visit to Australia organised by John, we journeyed with our son Gully to San Juan Ridge in California in 1982 to help build the Ring of Bone Zendo. Here we discovered the vitality and joy of sangha and sangha-building, fifty + people coming together for three weeks to build the dojo from scratch, though naturally there had been meticulous preparation for the build, with pine trees cut, the slab laid and teams assigned. The completed zendo was opened by Aitken and Yamada Roshi and their wives, and attended by teachers from other sanghas, a solemn event followed by an afternoon of dance, story-telling, comedy and music.

In 1984, a small group of sangha friends donated funds to buy land at Gorriks Run, which we then had zoned for a religious retreat. As we were a small sangha, it was decided to develop our wilderness zendo slowly, with a samu weekend held each month over many years. At the beginning we camped by the creek while clearing the road, setting up the tank stand, digging holes for the latrines. And as the buildings took form, inevitably we got to know each other, developing lasting and intimate friendships around the campfire. Hammering and painting and laughter are indeed the voice of the law.

Honolulu Diamond Sangha women began producing their journal *Kahawai* in the late 70's, providing support and inspiration for our women's group which formed in the mid-80's and still meets monthly, with annual women's retreats. When Roshi spoke to us of the fledgling Buddhist Peace Fellowship, a creatively-active Sydney BPF formed. We have been, and still are, an engaged Buddhist sangha. Through thick and thin, turmoil and disenchantment, joy and friendship, our sangha flows like the river, always changing. Babies grow up and have babies. Marriages form and dissolve. Long-term sangha members stop coming along, then return. Dear friends die. And through it all, Anne and Roshi's clarity, virtue, generosity and discipline shine forth.

Let true Dharma continue, sangha relations become complete.



Gilly and Tony beside Turrunburra *aka* the Lane Cove River

How I Came to Zen

Diana Levy

When I was 21 I met an American guy called Gary Angel on the back of a pick-up in Western Samoa in 1976. He was going to be visiting NZ later on so I invited him to come and stay at my place. I was in the last year of a double major Arts degree at Auckland Uni. He went back to the island of Kauai, in Hawaii where he lived, and we corresponded. Perhaps this is when I fell in love with him; with the wild promises that he made and the vision splendid of a life together. I abandoned most of my studies and flew off to Hawaii in July 1977 to be with him, planning to sit exams for one Philosophy paper, and one Sociology paper at the University of Hawaii.

But the romance fell apart within days of arriving. I was right out on a limb, knowing nobody else in Hawaii. He suggested that I consider living in the Zen centre in Honolulu, (Koko An), as it was cheap. But I mustn't mention his name. I could study at the university, which was just 5 minutes away from the Centre.

I moved to Honolulu and soon I went to a zazenkaï at Koko An. Andy Thomas and Michael Kieran were leading this. It was an absolute knockout. I still remember some of the things they said: *Don't hang onto what we are saying. Just let it wash through you and if anything sticks, it sticks.* This was completely different to the way of learning at university where I grasped at things and tried to make them stick. They also said, *Maybe you'll be attracted to this path because of the way the people are.* That people could embody this teaching; that was novel. I had heard of Zen through my study of existentialism. Aitken Roshi always mentioned my study of Philosophy and I think it signified to him that I was serious. For my part, I felt rather embarrassed because I had been such a poor student. But he had faith in me.

I thought Koko An was peaceful but I still wasn't sure of the whole idea of moving into the Zen centre and following their schedule, but I had a very encouraging dream of a white cat. When I realised that I had dreamed of Katsu - Roshi and Anne's cat, I decided to go for it.

The first sesshin I did was 5 days. Roshi was grandfatherly, and Anne was very sweet. They lived in a converted garage, goodness knows where they cooked or washed. They were kind to me in a hands-off sort of way, suggesting jobs, suggesting how to get around certain hurdles, and when I expressed an interest in dance therapy - dance was really my main passion - they allowed me to bend the schedule so that I could attend a weekly class. This was an invaluable tool to help me sort through my feelings.

All sorts of interesting things happened at Koko An. One time a kahuna (an Hawaiian healer) visited. I learned something from her that I still practise. Seung Sahn, the Korean Zen teacher visited. The famous poet W. S. Merwin (and his luscious young consort, at least 20 years his junior) gave a talk. Zen luminaries like the translator Stephen Mitchell visited and did sesshin. We had interesting sangha days with workshops and laughter - the other Anne Brown, who worked as a school counsellor was responsible for organising

those. Miyazaki Roshi came from Japan to try and straighten out our ritual. It was said that he had been a submarine captain during WW2 and he would not say how close he got to Allied territory. I met the Australians, Leigh, Geoff, John and his partner the American Susan Murcott. Ellen Davison did either the first or the second or both, of my sesshins.

But after 5 months I would have to leave the country where I had way overstayed my visa. I went back to NZ in 1978 with the intention of making enough money, and seeking admission to an American institution with dance in the curriculum.

I stayed in touch with Roshi by letter. Back in Auckland, I now felt out of place, although there was a Zen group who were allied with the drunkard Roshi (as I learned later) Sasaki - I sat with them. My brother told me I would make lots more money in Australia. So I flew to Melbourne in 1979, and stayed with an old school friend. Roshi wrote and told me that he was doing sesshin in Sydney, and did I want to come? Michael was coming out too, it was to be the first sesshin with a teacher in Australia. Of course I took a train up to Sydney, and was billeted at Patrick Kearney's place. He took me to Chinatown - sensory overload! - to go to Roshi's talk.

The sesshin was held near Campbelltown, and I had another interesting experience, this time involuntary shaking and carrying on. "*Makyo*", said Roshi. The Sydney Zen leaders were a bit perplexed. It was wonderful to see Michael again, and Roshi. I met lots of people whom I would later get to know much better. Afterwards I went back to Melbourne and the task of finding a decent job. There wasn't much of a Zen group there other than about 3 of us meeting at the home of a Kiwi woman named Helen.

John Cooper had a big gathering at his place, many people came, and Roshi gave a talk. Afterwards, Patrick Kearney gave me, the cripple, and Roshi, the luminary, a lift in his "meat truck". This was a ute which served the needs of his father's barbecue business. Roshi was to go to the north shore I think, and give another talk. I persuaded them to divert on the way, so I could go and see whether a newly minted drama friend would like to come to the second talk. At Surry Hills I got awkwardly out of the meat truck, hobbled across the road to the terrace house where Stephen Saulwick lived, and knocked on his door. It was evening; he thought about it; his choice would be to ride in the back of the ute; decided he'd rather go to the pub. Back at the ute, I said to the 2 of them, "*I'm glad it's dark, you can't see how red my cheeks are*". Roshi laughed and said, "*That's what Gary Snyder would call, giving someone a good push*".

The Road to Gorricks Run - A personal journey

Paul Maloney

My journey involves a mix of personal choices and chance encounters that, over my early years, altered the course of my life, all of which contributed, in some small way, to the sangha being here today. A fine example of the Buddha's teaching of dependent co-arising.

On Thursday 9th June 1966, I departed from Stonehaven beach on Hook Island in the Whitsunday Passage, at the southern end of the Great Barrier Reef. I had arrived there 12 days earlier to start my first major self- retreat, a retreat that changed my life forever, and marked my entry into the Buddhadharma. By a twist of fate, on Friday 10 June, exactly 50 years and one day, later I will step onto the Ancient Ground at Gorricks Run to start the Winter sesshin.

In 1966, Hook was uninhabited, so I had it to myself, not that I needed much, as it transpired. The little beach became my home for the next twelve days. I had no idea what to expect, knowing only that I needed to be in isolation for an extended period of time. It was a call of the heart, and one to which I had responded. This first step into the unknown was to take me on a long journey from the island to Cairns, then back to Sydney and on to Japan in May 1968, where I lived for five years before returning to Sydney in August 1973.

The fact that I had been in Japan at all is an interesting story in itself. It came about this way. In 1965 I was sharing a house with some friends whom I knew since the year I lived there in 1962. One day, a group of other friends who were visiting Sydney, came to the house. At lunch time the group decided to go out and have a pub lunch and asked me to join them. For some reason, I declined to offer, choosing instead to go by myself to a wonderful family-run vegetarian restaurant in Liverpool Street, just near Hyde Park corner. Some of you may remember it. Quite why I chose to go there I will never know, but that decision was to determine my future in most unexpected ways.

To my surprise, when I entered the restaurant I saw my yoga teacher, Russell Atkinson, sitting at a table, accompanied by a man who was a stranger to me. Russell invited me to join them, and he introduced me to his friend. As is my wont, I immediately forgot the person's name! What I didn't forget is what he told me. He said that he was studying Aikido! This was a revelation to me, for at that time Aikido was not well known in the west, apart from its reputation as being a very special and mysterious martial art. He explained that some three months before, a Japanese Aikido teacher, married to an Australian woman, had started an Aikido class in West Ryde on Tuesday nights. I was so excited that I went to meet the teacher, and started Aikido that very evening. One thing led to another and three years later I found myself on a ship to Japan together with a very special Cultural Studies visa to practice Aikido. The odd thing is, the stranger whom I met in the restaurant that day NEVER went to Aikido again! Having introduced me, he went on his way, so to speak. A sort of bodhisattva I feel, for without that Aikido visa, I may never have been able to go to Japan!!

At our 40th anniversary the name of John Cooper was often heard. For those who did not know him, John played a remarkable role in the formation of this sangha. He was, I like to think, a catalyst, in that while never being a member of the sangha, as such, he brought so many of us together, such that a nucleus was formed in the 1970s and early eighties. I know that I was one of them. Returning to Sydney in August 1973 after living in Japan since May 1968, I had a notion of contributing to the understanding that Australians' had about Japanese culture. To this end I visited the Australia Council, and was advised that I should speak to a John Cooper, the person in charge of international relations for the Council. John was away in India at the time, so I had to wait for some months before we could meet. One day I found myself sitting across the table from John Cooper. After talking to him about my intentions for a short while, I suddenly burst out, "Your John Cooper!" It was an odd thing to say under the circumstances, as it was John Cooper that I was there to meet, and with whom I was conversing.

John was the one who introduced me to Aikido and, as a consequence, had been instrumental in my being able to obtain a visa to Japan so many years before. When I told him my story, and the part he had played, he was really chuffed. He then invited me to join his yoga class, and it was there that I met Leigh Davison.

It was Leigh who played the central role in establishing the Sydney Zen Sangha. I had been sitting by myself since coming back to Australia, and if it wasn't for Leigh, I might still be doing so. It was at Leigh's mother's home that three of us began sitting together in 1975, the event that we celebrated last year. Leigh later set up and managed the first Linfield house that did so much to form the sangha in those early years. And Leigh was a member of the quartet that went to Hawaii to train with Aitken Roshi. Another was Geoff Dawson who, it must be acknowledged, made an outstanding contribution to the structure and development of the sangha over many years. I first met Geoff after he returned from a year in Japan where he trained for a year with Kobori Roshi in Daitokuji, Kyoto. It was Geoff, I believe, who first made contact with Aitken Roshi, Geoff also set up and managed the second Linfield house for the sangha after he returned from Hawaii. Furthermore, it is Geoff that we have to thank for finding Gorricks Run so many years ago. I think you will all agree we owe much to Geoff for the gifts that he has given us.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge my debt of gratitude to all the many bodhisattvas who, in their own unique way, guided me along the mysterious road to Gorricks Run

Discovering Ancient Ground Past Present and Future

(Edited reprint from Mind Moon Circle Autumn 2011)

Geoff Dawson

The story of how Gorrick's Run happened to become associated with the Sydney Zen Centre began in the early 1980's. A couple of years after I returned from studying Zen in Hawaii with Robert Aitken Roshi, I would search the pages of the Sydney Morning Herald on weekends looking for properties within about a two to three hour drive from Sydney. I was particularly interested in the Colo River area to begin with as I did a lot of bushwalking there and loved the meandering river.

One weekend however, I saw an advertisement for a couple of properties in the McDonald Valley area and became curious. No wonder the McDonald River area is known as *The Forgotten Valley*. I had lived in Sydney all my life and did a lot of exploring in the rural areas but it was off my radar screen.

Driving up from Sydney I was struck by the beauty of the natural scenery and the traces



of bygone colonial history in the old St. Alban's pub.

The Real Estate agent told me about this 40 acre property at the very end of a small valley called Gorrick's Run that ran off the main McDonald River valley. He said in a cautionary way that it was very isolated and had no power or any other

facilities, perhaps testing whether it was a waste of time taking me there. I was excited.

We drove up and crossed over the ford (which was far more primitive than it is today) and wound our way along the bumpy track until the valley opened out into a vast amphitheatre enclosed with high sandstone cliffs. How ancient and lonely and quiet it was - again with remnants of transient human existence embodied in the dilapidated ruins of twisted iron and sheet metal where a homestead once stood. We drove up onto the main paddock where the zendo and the house are today and my decision was immediate. This is it! - my whole being seemed to be saying. I told the agent that I was definitely interested in buying it either for myself or that a meditation group that I belonged to may be interested in buying it for a retreat centre. Things moved quickly from there. Other Sydney Zen Centre members came and had a look with me and we decided that the newly

incorporated Sydney Zen Centre would buy it. A number of people put up the money of \$40,000 mainly myself, Tony and Gilly Coote, Cathy and Kim Lukeman and a few others.

Then we hit a legal snag. The contracts were exchanged and all was going according to plan until the vendors tried to rescind the contract on the grounds that we mislead them to believe that the property was for private use and not for a retreat centre even though the contract had the name Sydney Zen Centre on it! We suspected that either they were offered a better deal or they started to catastrophize about their quiet valley being overtaken by religious fanatics.

One year and \$5,000 in lawyer's fees later the legal issues were resolved out of court and the land became the property of the Sydney Zen Centre. I mention these legal conflicts because it is important that those who visit Ancient Ground are aware of the karma behind acquiring it. I can give my personal assurance that the above facts are correct and the land was acquired without deception.

Originally the Darkinjang tribe were the custodians of this ancient land for tens of thousands of years. The hills and valleys surrounding Gorrick's Run are rich in Aboriginal sacred sites and there is one particular site we visited with an Aboriginal guide many years ago that was about a two hours walk further up the valley from the zendo. It was deeply moving to be there in that surprisingly well-preserved grotto.

In the early eighteen hundreds much of the McDonald River valley was cleared for white settlement and became a prosperous and bustling community of wheat farmers. It became the breadbasket for early colonial Sydney and sailing ships were able to navigate right up the river to where the St Alban's pub now stands and transport grain back to Sydney Harbour via the Hawkesbury River. Even the creek that runs through Gorrick's Run was once a free flowing stream before it silted up due to European farming practices. We were told that you could once fish for perch there!

In the book *The Forgotten Valley - A History of the MacDonald Valley and St. Albans, NSW*¹ it shows that the Sydney Zen Centre property was originally owned by a John Bailey. Isaac Gorrick owned most of the valley and hence the valley's name. Our land was used for growing crops and if you look closely on a moon lit night you can still see the remnants of furrows in the big paddock where the zendo is. When the Sydney Zen Centre bought the property it was being used to graze cattle and horses and there was more cleared land than there is today. The other side of the creek was a broad grassy paddock that has gradually grown back, mainly with wattles.

¹ *The Forgotten Valley - History of the MacDonald Valley and St. Albans NSW*. McHutton Neve. Library



The twisty Bridge, Macdonald River

All this while wombats have trundled along the same hillside tracks foraging for food at Gorrick's Run; the mopoke owls have hooted tirelessly through all the phases of the moon, season after season. The wind has blown through the same quiet landscape, oblivious to the achievements and sufferings of the humans. Perhaps the Darkinjang people corroboree-ed on the same big paddock, drawn to the wide and level valley floor and the natural amphitheatre of the high cliff.

Now this same Ancient Ground in its own unassuming way invites all who go there to return to their original nature. May it continue to be a rite of passage for generations to come.

Weather

Maggie Gluek

For the better part of a decade John Tarrant was Sydney Zen Centre's primary teacher. Tasmanian born, he was "around" in the earliest days of this sangha, pulled in by Leigh Davison whom he had met at a Tibetan Buddhist retreat. Shortly afterwards, John went to live in Hawaii to study with Robert Aitken and eventually received authority to teach. In 1986 Aitken Roshi, now almost 70, saw fit to pass on the baton and John travelled regularly to Australia to lead sesshin once, sometimes twice, a year, until 1996 when Subhana received full transmission of the baton.

John's Dharma name is Southern Dragon. Chinese dragons traditionally are responsible for big events in the heavens, rain and storms, sometimes delivered with kindness, sometimes with mischief. I now imagine John's tenure as teacher as being played out spectacularly across the skies here. His visits were anticipated with excitement, and were invariably intense passages, full of drama, psychic highs and lows. Thunder clapped. Sesshin participants remember the intimate pressure cooker that was forty-odd people packed into the cottage at Kodoji, upstairs and downstairs. (Spacious, actually.) The horses that galloped proudly around the paddock at first light. And the magic of sitting and hearing teisho under the old chestnut tree.

John cut an imposing and rather shambly figure, like a great bear, with an enveloping hug. A big presence physically—Tony Miller recalls him as a scary bowler in a cricket session—and a big personality, expansive and somewhat chaotic. He was known to transgress boundaries, including that of the schedule ... there were times when we sat until ten pm or beyond as he continued dokusan deep into the night, everyone giving it their all.

(I hasten to say that though I am speaking of John in the past tense, in the context of memory, he is alive and well and teaching with the Pacific Zen Institute in California.)

Those big dragon rains nourished the ground of sangha and brought new life to Zen practice here. John liked to question and to experiment. He challenged us to ask ourselves how the work on the cushion, how koans in particular, would apply in daily life. What does it mean to study Zen? He was interested in the matter of character, perceived strengths and weaknesses. Often he hazarded to give students advice "You need to do this" which was usually illuminating and, for better or worse, almost always lodged deeply.

He encouraged creativity. With his blessing we felt free to experiment with forms and rituals. New traditions evolved: chanting Kanzeon for a whole period until "you got lost in it" (as one friend said); walking a spiral kinhin outside in the moonlight; singing harmonies and improvising above the regular line during the sutra service. New kinds of retreats were held, beginning with the first women's sesshin in 1991 which boldly included singing and dancing as the voice of the Law.

Women stepped forward in the sangha when John made a point of promoting gender equality, insisting that two of the four sesshin leaders be women. Moreover, he looked to naming women as teachers in the Diamond Sangha. Because his wife Roberta and young daughter Sarah accompanied him to Australia on several occasions, children were incorporated into sesshin for the first time. People signed up to spend time with the kids, allowing parents some rare uninterrupted zazen. Play as practice, practice as play.



There is something dangerous about dragons. Or maybe it is that danger is attractive to dragons. The matter of venturing into the unknown, the unseen, to find out. *How would it be if I went this way? Maybe there's something to learn.* John liked surprises. He famously would throw the I Ching shortly before teisho and then fashion his presentation from the relevant hexagram. My sense is that he bored easily when things were “as usual,” predictable, and was keen to explore new directions. Not wanting to be contained, he pushed boundaries dangerously, finally bringing about rupture with Aitken Roshi and with the Diamond Sangha. This dark storm left a trail of destruction. Devastating for Roshi, for John's California sangha, for bewildered and angry students here. There were broken relationships and unanswered questions and deep wounds.

That all seems a long time ago now. I want to honour the gifts that went before. John was generous with us. He was funny, in the quick-witted way of Australians. His teishos, interspersed with warm laughter, were rich in language and in fresh expression of the Dharma. He told good stories and many of these live on live on, classic Zen tales colourfully enacted and contemporary anecdotes. Hearers still remember the monk Hakuin, falsely accused of paternity, being handed the baby and responding *Is that so?*

lovingly caring for the baby, changing nappies, and then, when the true father ‘fessed up, handing it back with *Is that so?*

Tony reminded me the other day of the one about the woman whose teenage daughter was about to leave home and head off to college. The mother had been particularly annoyed by her daughter’s habit of leaving a half-drunk cup of coffee randomly around the house, a behaviour which had persisted in spite of numerous admonitions. One morning she came across the errant coffee cup in the bathroom and it dawned on her: ‘*This* is what I’ll miss.’ A realisation about the particulars—not good, not bad—that are the person you love, and an appreciation of loss.

John’s love of the Way inspired many students here. I offer a bow of gratitude.



Maggie and John

Dear Kerry and the Sydney Zen Centre sangha
Best wishes for your 40th Anniversary celebration. Sending the wrong document is kind
of Zen isn't it? I hope it's a joyful time. John Tarrant (Santa Rosa, USA)



Janet Selby's Kodoji Dog, *Pip meets the Buddha*

Ancient Ground, Ancient Ground, you will look after it,
Ancient Ground, Ancient Ground, you will look after it,
My Children.

(Under this the chorus sings):

Ancient Ground, Ancient Ground, you will look after it,
Ancient Ground, Ancient Ground, you will look after it,
Ancient Ground, Ancient Ground, it will look after you,
Ancient Ground, Ancient Ground, it will look after you.



Building Kodoji

(Edited reprint from *Mind Moon Circle* Autumn 2011)

Tony Coote

Honorary Architect, Sydney Zen Centre

The first structures completed were the tank stand and a single pit toilet. Designed to be portable, the toilet has since been moved a couple of times. Then followed the cottage and kitchen (which was installed on just one weekend), a bush shower enclosure, an additional double pit toilet and a hut for the teacher (the Hojo). Until the completion of the new Dojo, retreats were held in the cottage using upstairs and downstairs as the dojo for up to forty people.

In September '96, work on the new dojo began. Building samu's started and continued on the fourth weekend of each month. Work periods were also included in a number of sesshin. The polishing of the Dojo floor marked the practical completion of the project on July 6 2001.

The principal idea for the new buildings was that they should appear entirely appropriate to their setting in the old paddock and that they should fit into the landscape as comfortably as possible. The forms and materials used in the farm buildings and sheds of the MacDonald Valley built since white settlement in the 1820s were the inspiration for the design of all the buildings.

Our tradition of Zen has a dear architectural aesthetic that can still be seen today in the temples of Kyoto, Kamakura and other parts of Japan. As well as reflecting the local farm buildings, the simple roof forms and surrounding verandahs of the cottage, Hojo and new Dojo also reflect the forms of traditional Japanese Buddhist meditation halls.



The simplicity of the design for the buildings has also been a response to the difficulty of access to the site, the inexperience of the voluntary workers, the absence of lifting equipment, a limited range of tools (for most of the project no power tools), as well as the sporadic nature of the work periods.

All the buildings are timber framed structures, mostly out of plantation pine. The earlier buildings have hardwood floors and verandah framing with hardwood verandah decking, but the new Dojo is framed entirely out of plantation pine. CCA treated stumps support



the floor and CCA treated pine is used for bearers, joists, decking and for the roof timbers where they are exposed to the atmosphere. CCA pine fence palings have been used as wall lining for the pit toilets and shower enclosure.

The choice of timber framing for the structures was governed by a number of criteria including the fact that timber is one of

the very few renewable resources. It is also easy to transport (often on car roof racks), easy to lift into place, relatively easy to work with and there is no need for site excavation. The Australian Conservation Foundation recommends that plantation pine should be used instead of hardwood because, at present, there is no proper forest stewardship in place and 70% of all hardwood logged goes to woodchips. Other materials used in the project, such as the zincalume roof, hardiflex wall cladding, were also chosen for their ease of use and ease of transportation. Second hand timber, windows and doors have also been used. The glass doors in the cottage were hand made and glazed with second hand shop window glass; also used in the cottage louvres.

The temperature in the valley varies from minus 6 in mid winter to plus 45 in summer and frosts are quite common in Winter. However, the main Dojo has been designed mainly for summer conditions as it was considered easier to rug up against the cold. The long wall of the Dojo faces north and there are verandahs on all four sides to give shade and shelter. A ventilated clerestorey gives air movement on hot days as well as an even natural light. The verandahs have been lined and insulated to prevent condensation dripping after frost and heat radiation from the roof on hot days and a gap has been left at the junction of the verandah and main roofs to allow ventilation of warm air. All the buildings have been located at the base of a steep hill which runs north south and which shades the buildings from the western sun in summer after about 3 o'clock in the afternoon.



Because of the very limited budget and the difficult access to the site, very careful ordering of materials during construction limited the creation of waste to a minimum. To ensure accurate ordering of materials, framing drawings were made for all walls, floors and roofs and layout drawings were made for sheet materials such as plywood, gyprock and metal roofing.

The use of water and the limitation of waste are factors which are given close attention during Zen Buddhist retreats. For example, each person is given a single bucket of warm water each day for the camp showers and careful attention is paid to ordering the correct quantities of food, most of which is kept without refrigeration (even in summer) and all waste is sorted for recycling.

With some exceptions, such as the Dojo roof plumbing, flooring and internal plaster board work together with solar lighting system, all the work of Kodoji was completed by volunteer labour, mostly with hand tools. A generator was bought during the construction of the Dojo.

Many of the volunteers were totally unskilled, some not knowing which end of a nail to put into the wood. However for some, the experience of working on this project gave them the confidence to become owner-builders for their own homes. The work was done over the years on one weekend a month beginning in 1995. From time to time there were slightly longer working periods.

What next? March 2011, a building samu with around twenty people enclosed both ends of the cottage verandah, creating a covered choppers' space and a second hojo.



Not Looking/Finding

Sally Hopkins

Not looking, I found the Sydney Zen Centre when it was already established, there at Young St., Annandale and in place at Gorrick's Run; a cottage, the hojo, and doorless showers and toilets. All the hard work and commitment of a great many people, all this I stepped into, much as we all step into what has been handed down to us through the centuries.

The first sesshin was an eye-opener- so many delights. The paddock dotted with tents, black robed people everywhere. Forty of us sitting up and downstairs in the cottage, crammed together: silent. Morning sutra chanting all squeezed together upstairs, making a joyful noise while the birds sang in the trees outside; the meal ceremony so precise and beautiful; the wonderful silence without cars, without lights. Paraffin lamps at night, swinging in the breeze. Teishos under the big old chestnut tree that now returns to the earth. Words of wisdom and poetry offered by John Tarrant together with the bird's song and lizards moving in the grass. I could not make head nor tail of most of what was said or chanted, but it didn't seem to matter.

I had been to the Second Womens Sesshin and found the pleasure of dharma friendships that have endured for over twenty years, as we practice and support each other navigating life's waves.

Subhana was given Transmission (I can hear the huge white tent erected for that sesshin, flapping in the wind), then she moved to Sydney, so there was for the first time a resident teacher, and competition for authority seemed (to me) to no longer be present. Yet of course Sangha relations always produce challenges. A lot of the stresses and strains came from the whole process of transplanting an Eastern tradition into a different culture. It was being democratized. Concensus was being taken up as the way to proceed, and the Board was responsible for everything except the teaching. Teachers were allowed to be human beings on the path- not Enlightened Beings without flaws. Much thought was given to the roles and duties of Teachers, Board, and Sangha. When I was on the Board I found it a wonderful experience working with others for the benefit of all.

SZC moved from having our teachers come from overseas (Aitken Roshi, John Tarrant Roshi) to our own local members becoming the teachers. Subhana (the first woman teacher in the Diamond Sangha - a thrilling event) and then Gilly, then Paul, Maggie a Diamond sangha teacher and Allan an apprentice teacher. Now a model of shared teaching responsibility, away from the previous model of a sole teacher. We have all greatly benefitted.

The present temple Kodoji was built over many years of dedicated planning and work by many people led by Tony Coote. Early in the piece samu during sesshin involved working on the underpinnings of the building. This was practice indeed. As well there was sometimes blackberry grubbing samu in groups, possibly something akin to that of monks working in the field.

When my husband and I came to Sydney to care for his parents, the evening sittings at Annandale were the most wonderful support. No need for words. The silent concentration together helped to keep things on track. The sense of a solid body of people practicing, for all that body was constantly changing; the words of wisdom offered by our teachers, past, present, near, and far; and a great deal not spoken.

The clear looking into aging and death, and no aging and no death, as our family members failed, sangha members died, and we all aged.

Invaluable.

We lived at the zendo for 9 years, and indeed really saw, as Roshi said, that “we are all in this together”. I am immensely grateful for SZC, for the work of so many, for the companionship of so many. Thinking back over the years it is not stories that spring to mind, but vivid moments, moments at Kodoji, at Annandale, all the comings and goings. The laughter, the tears, the kindnesses; the crickets and lyrebirds, butcherbirds and magpies, the wind in the gum tree that was recently blown down; the anger of someone wishing to be told what could not be said; the candles burning brightly in the silence; the storms raging around the hills at Kodoji: sitting and sharing tea or a potluck lunch with dharma friends.

The singing. The silence. This great life.

Open Circle

Susan Murphy

I'm feeling sad and disappointed that a longstanding previous commitment with Uncle Max Harrison to speak at the Aloka Meditation Centre at Mangrove Mountain on November 15 has completely clashed with the time and date set for celebration of the 40th birthday of Sydney Zen Centre, my old home in the dharma. Dammit! I know it will be a gala – possibly even a galah - event!

I would have relished catching up with old friends and acquaintances stretching back over decades, and hearing some of the stories that will be told on the day, as well as enjoying meeting people newer to SZC. It's hard not being able to share the moment. The fifteenth of the month is of course the day of enlightenment, so I know the stories recounted will be mellow, funny, inclusive and generous. It's hard to know what I'd be inspired to add to the emerging mandala of stories from the hundreds of possibilities, but here are five tiny moments that come to mind right now.

The first is walking up the stairs at Annandale moments after Subhana walked down them from the big front room, where Aitken Roshi was waiting to spend an entire allocated hour with me, talking about whatever I chose to raise with him. He'd offered this to whoever signed up, and, knowing nothing, I'd accepted the offer. This was my first real meeting with him. Later it reminded me of Lucy daring to talk to the old professor in *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, cautiously and yet determinedly, about Narnia – that mysteriously full and amazing world that lay just on the other side of some ordinary old coats in a musty cupboard. The graciousness of Roshi, offering this chance to anyone who might be innocent enough to take it up, changed my life.

Another is the old, windowless garage at Annandale as it used to be, scene of my first encounter in dokusan with John Tarrant during a two-day city sesshin. With a two-year-old child at that time, I couldn't manage anything longer than that. And with a marriage in deep disarray, I could barely manage even that. But there was also little choice. In one corner of the concrete floor, a huge pile of old seagrass matting, in the other, beside a flickering candle, John. I asked for my first koan. And for my sins, he gave it to me. Perhaps the searing headache of Day Two burnt in every detail as deeply as it has. I could paint it for you, but Rembrandt could do it best.

One more is the delicious presence of the three horses who would grace our Gorrick's sesshins, usually galloping up through the mist into the paddock from way down the road just after breakfast on Day Four. The Arab would lead the victory circles and the Shetland and the other horse would follow, often coming to rest between circuits in their 'offstage area' under the wattles beside the hojo. When the servers ate breakfast at the picnic table that used to be placed at the end of cottage verandah, the horses would gather close in beside them in perfect reach of morsels that were not actually on offer at all. And at night - clomp clomp, chomp chomp - all around the tents, but never tripping a fly rope. I'm certain someone else will lovingly recount this story!

Second last: the Womens' Sesshin the time we shaped the days around an exploration of the story of Demeter and Persephone, and Persephone's descent into the underworld. To commit to the making of the descent, we had to place our hands in blue or red paint, and contribute our handprint to the big sheet gradually filled with blue and red hands. The underworld, if you are not aware of this fact, lies in the half-hidden gully that runs along from the little corner waterfall and carves the edge of the paddock. Gradually, everyone

committed and walked in to meet whatever lay waiting there for them. It was powerful. I can still find minute flecks of blue and red paint on my poor old rakusu.

And finally, mid afternoon at Gorriks, after the official opening of the eye of the new dojo, standing with Aitken Roshi looking on to a scene that had by then descended into slightly wild good-natured chaos. Zafus were flying through the air. I noticed they were being thrown by a self-appointed performance artist from the big pile of cushions we had brought to the event to help supplement the supply. It wasn't particularly amusing to notice that. But the mood was unbreakably joyful. We looked on together at the dozens of Zen students gathered from all over, all talking and laughing. I asked Roshi, 'What do you think of your handiwork, then?' He replied, 'A jungle of monks, at sixes and sevens!' Wumen was there, in approving agreement. We both laughed, and then, unplanned, gassho'ed in unison towards the melee.

Sydney Zen Centre provided something incomparable – for me, above all, an opportunity to plunge into the Dharma head-first and trusting, in the presence of some exceptional past teachers, but also and perhaps finally equally, for me, the insurmountable opportunity to experience the strong complexities of sangha life for a long stretch of time - the Dharma and the drama profoundly mixed and charged with human-all-too-human foibles - some of them undoubtedly my own! – all bonded together by one fiercely shared ultimate commitment.

The red thread can be stretched, and pulled against, and sometimes even strongly denied, but that changes nothing, for still it can never ever be cut, and no-one can be cast off it. It links us all, one body, one dharma, one becoming. Zen Open Circle joins me in congratulating SZC for forty entirely interesting years helping to blaze a path of Zen on this continent. Long may you shine as one bright jewel in the wide net of dharma in this continent.

The wild sea, the river of heaven

Jeffrey Ward

荒海や佐渡に横たふ天の川

ara umi ya / the wild sea

sado ni yokotou/ stretching out to Sado

ama no gawa/ the river of heaven

Basho (1644-1694)

Robert Aitken writes in his book *The River of Heaven: The Haiku of Basho, Buson, Issa and Shiki* that he discovered Basho's poem from which he took the title of his book (and I take the title of this article) in 1938. He went on to say that he couldn't have known then that this would open the door to a life-long love of the haiku of Basho and, more generally, of Japanese poetry. I came across this poem while living in Japan in the mid-80s in a book on Japanese literature, the title and author of which I can't remember. There was a commentary on the poem that suggested that this haiku was evoking the two Buddhist dimensions of samsara and nirvana – the world of suffering in the wild or rough sea and the image of Sado Island, and the path of nirvana in the river of heaven, which is the Japanese name for the Milky Way. Sado Island is known in Japan as a forbidding place, an island of imprisonment and exile. In these brief few words, Basho's condensed imagery creates a complex feeling of travail, longing and hope. Since discovering the poem, it has been a kind of dandelion blowing around in the space of my mind over the years. It comes and goes, reappearing in my awareness when prompted by some association or other. It has come to condense for me something of my path in life and my path in Zen practice. Here I want to use it to reflect a little on my experience of Buddhist practice and the role the Sydney Zen Centre has played in that journey, and the journey of my life more generally.

I never met Aitken Roshi personally, nor practised with him. However, my first contact with the Sydney Zen Centre involved Aitken Roshi. It occurred when I attended a public talk he gave at the Chinese Buddhist Society in Dickson Street in downtown Sydney. According to Paul Maloney, this could have been in 1979, or in the year or two after that when the Sydney Zen Centre met in Dickson Street. I had been practising for 4 or 5 years in the Thai Forest tradition with the monks from Wat Buddharangsee in Stanmore. They also held meditation meetings at the Chinese Buddhist Society. I can't remember how I came to be at the talk by Aitken Roshi. But I remember a lot of people dressed in black and Aitken Roshi in Japanese garb. He talked about the koan about Hyakujo and the duck (Blue Cliff Record, Case 53), and I had no idea what he was talking about. People laughed knowingly at times and I felt as if there was a shared joke that some people understood but that I didn't have access to. But it had been reading about zen in books by Daisetz Suzuki and Alan Watts that led me to Buddhist practice in the first place and so I wasn't put off by not understanding. I had read about koans and their supposed inscrutability, but somehow at that time, I didn't pursue practice with SZC further.

In the mid-80s, while I was living in Japan for two years, I started zen practice in the Soto tradition, attending zazenkai and being introduced to the practice of *shikan taza*. This became my practice for the next decade or so. It fitted well with what I had learned from my main teacher at Wat Buddharangsee, Ajahn Boonyarath, who taught the practice of "no doing with". And it was at this time in Japan that Basho's haiku came into my life. At the time, I understood the poem to be saying something like one has to transform the wild or rough seas of one's life into the river of heaven, and that zen practice would bring about this transformation. And there is a sense in which this understanding is an adequate

description of my experience, but the way in which I thought this would occur at the time involved an enlightenment fantasy of transcending the rough seas of my life.

Like many of us who come to zen practice, I had grown up in a family where there was unhappiness and trauma. In the background of many people of my age born in the fifties, there was the trauma of the Second World War and its reverberations in the psyches of the generation who grew up and participated in the war. My father spent the years from 18 to 23 in the air force lonely and deeply unhappy at being away from home. In his life, there was earlier trauma of a violent father and poverty, the latter meaning he had to leave school and go to work in a factory at the age of 12.

My parents married, as many did during the war, with a sense of being at the end of things and needing to find someone to cling to. In addition, I only learned two years ago that my mother's early life was marked by childhood trauma that she had kept to herself her whole life, information that for me and my sisters and brothers brought into focus and made sense of a deep unhappiness in her that until then was experienced by us as a kind of confusion. My father drank too much and was at times violent. My mother was unhappy and seemed unable to master life. For years she was dulled by Valium, as were many of her generation. I remember thinking as a young teenager that I had to find a way, a way to live that had a chance of happiness. I thought to myself, these people don't know how to be happy. This initiated a search to transform the rough seas that I seemed adrift in into something that had a possibility of something like happiness in it – there must be a river of heaven somewhere.

After I came back to Australia from Japan towards the end of the eighties and was living in Newtown, I used to go to the evening sits in Annandale at the Sydney Zen Centre. But at that time, I never really connected with the sangha. I was busy with my young daughter and work. My practice over the years had brought calmness into my life and I didn't feel the need at the time for a deeper engagement. And then in the mid-nineties, after moving to Canberra, my relationship with my partner fell apart and I was again adrift on a rough sea of suffering and it was at this time, that I attended sesshin with Sydney Zen Centre for the first time. It was the first sesshin that Subhana taught after having received transmission. Entering the sesshin, I was broken, probably clinically depressed. It was gruelling in a way that no other retreat had been before, but something shifted in that week and I unexpectedly found joy and laughter, at least for a time. I have attended sesshin regularly since then and the Sydney Zen Centre and its Canberra satellite, the Canberra Zen Group, became my practice home.

So Sydney Zen Centre and the guidance of Subhana helped me to reconnect with my life at the time. For a few years, I continued with *shikan taza* but then out of curiosity took up koan practice. I have heard many criticisms of koan practice over the years, but I quickly discovered that although I had been sitting deeply and had found great peace in my practice, I was able to deepen my practice with koan study in ways that I might never have known, if I hadn't taken the koan path. For me, the efficacy of the koan system lies in the way in which it gathers the searching heart in practice and exhausts the various facets of the fundamental enlightenment fantasy and in doing so reveals what has always been there. I am so grateful to Aitken Roshi and to everyone at the Sydney Zen Centre for transmitting and keeping this koan tradition alive. Personally, I am deeply grateful to Subhana and Paul Maloney who have been so gracious with their time and patience in guiding this bumbling wayfarer over the past twenty years.

So I never had the chance to practice face-to-face with Aitken Roshi, but I am a benefactor of his practice and his teaching. The story is well known how he responded to

and nourished the Sydney Zen Centre. I am also grateful for his love of poetry and I was moved when I read that this poem of Basho's had played an important role in his life as it has in my own. I have lived with the poem as a kind of reference point and over the years I have had different readings of it. It moved from searching for the river heaven, to the river of heaven and the rough sea being not-two; but these days I would maybe say, what *is* all this talk about seas and stars! And I would just recite the poem: wild seas stretching out across to Sado, the river of heaven.

Into the well of my memories

Tony Miller

In 1988 Anzac Day was a Monday, so we were able to hold a three-day retreat at Gorriks. If my Annandale memory has a feminine flavour, this one is masculine. The retreat was led by Geoff Dawson, and Tony Coote gave yoga instruction. One of Tony's loosening routines I still remember and use. On Anzac Day we rose in the dark before dawn, and as we were pissing at the edge of the field a meteor flashed down in the southern sky, close enough to make the hissing sound one sometimes hears as a meteor burns up. (Can that be right?) Kim Bagot later observed that this occurred at the same time that the Anzacs would have made their landing and that artillery barrages from sea and hill-top would have begun on 25 April 1915.

It was Geoff Dawson's determination to find a retreat property for the sangha and who discovered Gorriks Run. Geoff was made an apprentice teacher by John Tarrant, but a whole range of things—mismanagement and testing of limits and personality clashes—led to Geoff's leaving SZC and eventually setting up the Ordinary Mind Zen School.

Zen Beginnings

Philip Long

I first visited the Sydney Zen Centre around April in 1989. I had been introduced to meditation by my therapist who gave me a guided meditation tape. The tape was of a man describing how to meditate with a droning and very boring voice. I started meditating but soon felt that I needed more expert help. I remembered reading books by Alan Watts and D. T. Suzuki in my 20s; I didn't really understand them then and thought that Zen was just a matter of acting naturally and "letting it all hang out". No mention was made of zazen, although at the time I read these books I was doing a simple form of "relaxation therapy". Now, I decided that the experts in meditation were the Buddhists and since I knew a little about Zen I would start there. I looked Zen up in the phone book and there it was. I phoned up and went along to try it out. I felt that to get anything out of it I would really have to dedicate myself for the rest of my life. However, I was surprised when I arrived to find all the ritual and chanting; I only wanted meditation not another religion. (I had been an avowed atheist for nearly 20 years.) Tony Miller gave me a brief orientation and I quickly formed the opinion that one did everything stiffly and with much effort.

There was no resident teacher in those days and I did not feel that I was well enough to go for sesshin at Gorrick's. I became desperate to meet a Zen teacher as all the books I now read said that this was essential. My partner, Peter, found an article in the paper about Fr. Ama Samy and I went to a public talk he gave around September, 1989. Late in the next year I attended my first sesshin with Ama Samy at an all luxuries Catholic retreat centre at Toongabbie and was hooked straight away. In one of the breaks I went out into the garden and decided to hug a tree but the tree seemed to be breathing rather than me and it was hugging me! In dokusan Ama Samy said: "As I listen to you speak, Philip, I think you are a person very much bound up with obligation." And "You don't need a Zen teacher, Philip, *life* is your teacher!"

I attended a SZC New Year's sesshin in either 1989/1990 or 1990/1991. Diana Levy was the only woman attending; the rest were all rather tall men. Diana dubbed it the "Tall Men' Sesshin". We were sitting in the heat with all the flies, everyone furiously concentrating (on Mu?). A number of cows wandered into the field: "Mooooooooo!" An uncontrollable burst of laughter spread around the zendo. Does a cow have Buddha Nature?

Around this time I attended my first SZC sesshin with a teacher, John Tarrant. In question time a man struggling with asthma asked: "Is the breathing more important than the posture or is the posture more important than the breathing?" "Yes!", answered John. I began attending SZC sesshins regularly and at one sesshin even managed to sit up all the way through the 7 days. I began working on koans and after a while Subhana began teaching. From her I learnt to enjoy koans and came to feel I was truly on the Zen path and that the SZC was my spiritual home.

At one zazenkai a Japanese man attended. After leaving school he did what had once been very popular for young men like him and went into a Zen monastery for 6 months.

He remembered a teisho given by his teacher. A man wanted his caged bird to sing. “Sing bird, sing”, he said pointing a finger at the cage. “But,” with disappointment, “Bird no sing.” “But ... but ... Wait ... wait ... wait ... Bird sing!” Magic.

At another zazenkaï, a Japanese Zen teacher, Inoue Roshi sat with us. He was in Australia to set up a Zen university with an Australian businessman. While we were drinking tea and eating cake, he suddenly thrust a piece of cake in my face and asked me: “What is the taste of this cake?” I took the piece of cake from him and bit off a large piece. An audible gasp went around the room; everyone in the room except the Roshi knew I was allergic to cake. “Ah, delicious!” said the Roshi.

Over the last 26 years I have come to learn much from the many dedicated, varied and wise practitioners and teachers (is there a difference?) I have met – from both their answers and their questions. I have received at least one jewel from each one I met and am truly grateful to all those who walk the way with me. Another case in point. Years ago I went to a talk by Hogen San at a yoga centre at Taylor’s Square. After some zazen and a talk by Hogen San there was a question and answer time. One person asked: “During zazen, how tight should the anal sphincter be?” I thought to myself: “What an idiot! Hogen San will make short work of him.” No, I was wrong. Hogen San proceeded with a long and very earnest dissertation on the subject which, summarized, amounted to this: “Not too tight; not too loose.” A guide for all our practice.

Women's Group

Kerry Stewart

There are varying accounts of when women from the Sydney Zen Centre started meeting together. Memories range from the mid 1980s to 1990, but now it doesn't seem that important, because over this very long time we have developed a form and practice that nourishes and supports all of us. Every second Friday of the month we take turns hosting the members in our homes and sharing our stories. We travel far and wide to make sure no one is left out: Nowra, Daceyville, Clandulla, Hunters Hill, Culburra, Dulwich Hill, Seaforth and Mt Colah – to name a few. There are no leaders, or, we are all leaders. Whoever is hosting, prepares treats for us to have with a cuppa, which makes us sound rather like the CWA, which isn't a bad thing. We have a lot in common with those country ladies – we sew for the community, we donate money to people in need, and we make a mean scone with wild blackberry jam.

We also have a retreat at Kodoji every year. It used to be around the Australia Day long weekend, but after I had to be driven to hospital suffering from heat stroke, we decided to make it a couple of months later. The retreats are incredibly creative and restorative. Over the years we have played out the mythic story of Persephone going to the underworld (or a barren patch across the creek with burnt blackberry bushes); dyed fabric with indigenous plants; walked an olive branch instead of the keisaku during the Gulf War; sculpted Jizos and Kuan Yins; drawn Hungry Ghosts; laughed; made banners for protest marches; sung songs; written poetry; cooked an extraordinary array of delicious food; cried; basked on the riverbank and dunked into the swimming hole; painted each other's toenails as an act of love; walked in the bush; lay in the middle of the field at night, watching the movement of the stars; and of course, sat as still as the surrounding cliffs.

People have come and gone from the group over the last few decades, but there is a substantial core group who still benefit from the simple act of gathering, talking and listening. Silence while someone else is talking, has allowed us the privilege of really hearing what our friends are saying. It is very rare for a group of people to listen to you and not make comment, or interrupt with their own story. Young members to the group are encouraged to tell their story, with no fear of judgement. So, as we age together it's been a process of bearing witness to each other's lives. A lot of heart and the dharma are involved in this act, so when life is tough, as it sometimes is, I'm comforted by the knowledge that these women deeply know me and we share the same understanding of existence. I feel the thousand arms of this Kuan Yin wrap around me.



A 45 degree women's sesshin



Women who mistook their zafus for a hat.

Now and Zen

Alex Budlevskis

This piece is to write about my experiences at the SZC as a newer member, in reflection of the SZC's 40th year and what that means to a newer student. Like many people being drawn to Buddhism or a spiritual practice, two things drove me the strongest in the beginning. The sense of "something missing", despite most parts of my life seeming generally okay at the time. Also the gradual dribs and drabs of Buddhist writings I had read over the years that just seemed genuine, insightful and without any evangelical tinge. No pressure, no doctrine, just the encouragement to see things as they are for yourself and to live life open-heartedly. Search your own experience and see what you find. In the middle of this musing period I met Allan Marret who's manner and casual discussions about Zen spurred me to seek out the SZC and try a weekly sitting. Since sitting, listening and meeting with the teachers over a few years now, the simplicity and directness of the practice has been nothing short of profound. It has helped me appreciate the Buddhadharmas that was relevant 400 years ago, was also relevant 40 years ago, and is still relevant today.

I have read about the gradual travel of Buddhism from the Hindu culture of India, to the Taoist and Confucian culture of China, then to the culture of Shinto and Imperialism in Japan, and finally landing in multi-cultural multi-faith egalitarian Australia. This brings a question in my mind – what will Zen look like in Australia after the Australian culture has moulded the practice? I heard that in the traditional Japanese Zen, a dissatisfied teacher could end dokusan without a single word being muttered, and a simple ring of the bell. Awakening could be delivered by the whack of a stick or vicious shout! If I had of experienced this in the early days of my practice I can't say I would have been all that happy to return again. I suspect this moulding has been happening deeply already.

Among many of my friends around my age (I'm 32) there is a very strong negative sentiment against any organised religion, which I can understand given both old and recent history. As I reflect on world affairs, many actions done in the name of Faith seem to be far away from an openhearted and compassionate source. I can imagine my friend's scepticism at hearing I practice Zen in light of this climate and their atheism. One friend told me that if I take the practice seriously he expects me to start levitating and being happy all the time. We'll see.

Even though Zen can be misunderstood among minds trying to find where it fits within religions, I am indebted to the practice and to all the people still quietly maintaining it; the many teachers and long-term sitters of the SZC; the people who worked tirelessly to build and maintain Kodoji. All supporting the simple practice of looking deeply into the way things are, studying the Self, surrendering to a greater intimacy with life, finding our natural open-heartedness, seeing through our conditioning and egos. I see these as timeless jewels of practice for anyone and any culture. In this simplicity, I see Zen as beyond religion, beyond culture, beyond scepticism, even beyond 'Zen'. Zazen is zazen, "things as they are" will always be things as they are. From this, the question arises again in my mind - as we continue to carry this practice and tradition, what will the practice of

Zen look like once the Australian culture continues to have its influence? What about modern psychology and neuroscience? What about the new secular mindfulness and meditation craze taking over? This may end up my koan for the next 40 years at the SZC, should I be so blessed.

Into the well of my memories

Tony Miller

I spent periods on the board, and was even chair for a year or two. Meetings were sometimes constructive, sometimes boring, sometimes strained—as is the range with meetings of other such bodies on which I have sat. At one time we allowed a recently released prisoner to move into the Zendo as a resident. It seemed a compassionate thing to do, but naively we did not consider the damage that such a person might be carrying, including the habits of relating that are learnt in prison life. An existing resident reported receiving a threat from this new resident. The board had to consider the conflicting accounts of the two people. This was before we had a complaints or conflict resolution process – which would have moderated the escalation of feeling that took place on all sides. In the event the board voted to ask the new resident to leave, but disagreement was profound and bitter and some of the participants were never reconciled.

Sunday zazenkais at Annandale used to be full-day events, or perhaps I should say they continued into the afternoon, because it was possible to sit for the morning only, though many came for the day. The first time I attended a zazenkai, sitting seiza, I was raw enough that I thought I had to sit not only with my back straight but with my head erect out in front of me. One of the leaders was Lisa Jensen, who spoke to me softly, ‘Tony, you can tuck in your chin and relax your neck,’ gently making the adjustment at the same time. Something about this momentary contact made me feel welcomed and cared for. Once Jenny Gentle was jiki-jitsu. She rang the bell with exquisite sensitivity, the third strike just a little softer than the first two. I know that that variation is not strictly correct, but I felt it ushering me with the same gentleness into a realm of quietness—not that I dwelt there for long.

Lisa died suddenly of a heart attack at an early age, leaving a young family. Jenny was, and I hope still is, a leather-jacketed lipsticked motor-cyclist plus a devoted student of the dharma who studied it in the original languages—an uncommon combination.





In a cave behind Gorricks are some ancient paintings recorded here by Janet Selby.



