



Chris Abbey loves horseback riding

Sangha Spotlight: Chris Abbey

Chris Abbey, easily recognizable with her curly red hair and brightly patterned, colorful clothes, grew up on the East Coast, lived in New York City, and worked in publishing until the 1980s. Everyone she knew seemed to be in therapy, but their neuroses continued to rule their lives. One day Chris asked her husband, Michael, "Do we have any friends that are not crazy?" They decided to ditch the Big Apple, head West, and settled in the Rogue Valley, which seemed a good place to raise their two daughters.

Chris worked at the Medford Mail Tribune for 14 years, beginning as a news clerk, moving up to copy editor, and finishing as assistant editor of the weekly entertainment section, Tempo. "I loved my job most of the

time," she said, noting how difficult it was to be a working mother in a profession where you were expected to be available even on holidays. "I drew the line at that," she recalled.

Chris had been reading dharma books for years. When her father became ill with cancer and died in May 2008, she found Sogyal Rinpoche's book, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, very meaningful. Just 16 months later her mother died, and Chris was present. Again, she turned to the book to help get through this difficult period.

Feeling a need for deeper connection, Chris asked a friend who was associated with Tashi Choling, "How do you get involved with a teacher?" That person referred Chris to Lama Bruce Newman, from whom she subsequently took many classes. "At the time, Lama Bruce alternated the focus of his weekly classes. One eight-week section would be meditation, the next would be studying a book. I liked being with others. The questions that came up were really interesting, often things I hadn't thought of myself. I especially liked studying *What Makes You Not a Buddhist* and *Rebel Buddha*. I also did a 4-year round of Marig Munsel with Lama Bruce. I found the first year very difficult. For me, *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* is tough going. I relate more to *Words of My Perfect Teacher*. My copy of that book looks very beat up. Not that I mistreated it or spilled anything on it, but I consult it a lot."

In 2010, Chris realized that she wanted to take refuge. Lama

Chonam agreed to give Chris refuge at the temple residence, but when the day came, Gyatrul Rinpoche indicated that he wanted to do the refuge ceremony himself. The day that she took refuge was the first time that Chris met Rinpoche. "I was aware that something special was happening," she said. "I'd been told that Rinpoche did not give individual refuge ceremonies anymore. I felt humbled and honored. Taking refuge felt like a necessary step. I knew I had made a commitment and connection that would be central to my life."



Chris has had multiple sclerosis (MS) for 40 years. At the time that she took refuge, she was still able to walk and drive. There was a long period of remission, with one or two mild attacks a year. Yet, working and raising two children, it was still challenging. "Even though we have the Americans with Disabilities Act, if

you tell your employer that you have a chronic illness, they will find a way to fire you." In 2006, with worsening symptoms from MS, Chris was forced to leave the Mail Tribune.

For three years, Chris worked from her home as the scheduler for Tibetan physician Dr. Dickey Nyerongsha. It was work she really enjoyed; "it was like a spiritual practice," she said. Acting as an intermediary for patients, listening to them, and reporting to Dr. Dickey afterwards was rewarding. "I like being useful," Chris shared. In November 2017, however, a ruptured appendix forced Chris to give up the job and spend two weeks in the hospital.

She received financial help from sangha members to pay for the cost of ambulance service and home health care, as well as gifts and cards that helped her struggle up a difficult road. "I will be forever grateful for the help that was given to me," she said.

The worst and most disturbing part of her experience came as the result of all the drugs, including anesthesia followed by morphine, used to lessen pain. "I couldn't even remember mantras or prayers, or respond in conversation. It has taken me a lot of time to recover my brain. Some days I still feel I might not completely recover," she said. Deeply distressed, Chris got in touch with Shashi Reitz. Shashi said, "Rinpoche says you should concentrate on getting better, nothing else, and doing what you have to do to get out of the hospital."

Chris had an interview with Rinpoche at Tashi Choling in 2015, just before Rinpoche moved to Half Moon Bay. "I felt like I was a tangled ball of yarn when I arrived. I was whining and complaining about the pain I have, and how difficult it is to practice. He asked me, 'Why are you making yourself crazy about practice?' I felt that he went into my mind and unraveled my confused brain. The sun came out. I think he always knows what is going on in my mind."

Chris is pretty much housebound these days and would like to have more company, especially in the form of visits from sangha members and especially during times when her husband is at work. Give her a call to set up a time to visit. And be ready for some thoughtful, humorous, and engaging conversation. Her number is 541-301-2924.

--Gaea Yudron



Spring Cleaning Party



Ani Baba, Lisbeth LaCoste, and Deidre Goldberg at an East Wing cleaning party in April



Enjoying each other's company at a lunch break

Photos by Ani Yeshe



Rinpoche and sangha members in May at Orgyen Dorje Den



At the spring Vajrasattva retreat, many participants gathered to send a birthday greeting via photo to Luc Ridler, a dear sangha brother who lives in Canada

By Popular Request

At our April cleaning party and lunch extravaganza, Laurie Gadbois' Cheese Nut Loaf was highly popular, and people wanted the recipe for it. Laurie says she has carried this recipe around for 40 years. It is delicious. Enjoy!

Cheese Nut Loaf

4 eggs
1 pound (4 cups) grated cheese (cheddar and provolone)
1 1/2 cup finely chopped walnuts
1 cup cooked brown rice
1/2 cup quick oatmeal or chopped rolled oats
1/2 cup chopped mushrooms
1 medium onion chopped
1 clove garlic
1/2 teaspoon salt
thyme, rosemary, pepper to taste

Combine all ingredients and press into oiled 8x5" loaf pan
Bake at 350 for 50 minutes. Let stand 5 minutes before cutting.

8-10 servings



A beautiful new Vajrasattva statue was recently completed at ODD



Bamboo Forest in Kyoto, Japan

Reflections on Our Aging Sangha

Quite a few members of our Tashi Choling sangha are now in their 60s, 70s, and 80s. Forty years ago, many of these early pioneers devoted their strength and energy to build the Vajrasattva statue and temple and help develop the center's programs. Now that group is old—a topic not often discussed, except in somewhat nervous jest. Some older sangha members cannot easily take part in retreats or pujas anymore because of physical or mental limitations. What is that like for them? Some sangha members are caregivers for a parent; others are caregivers for a friend or spouse. In addition, we have two sangha members who are receiving hospice care.

Our sangha is not the only group dealing with many of its members aging and dying. Many sanghas are in the same boat. Some are staging forums to discuss the issues, or presenting educational programs to help practitioners individually and as a group. If you Google “aging sangha,” you will find some interesting reports on what other sanghas are saying and doing.

Julie Rogers, a longtime sangha member currently living in the San Francisco Bay Area, founded TLC Transitional Life Care, a nonprofit designed to educate and support practitioners and others in illness and dying. The organization's website is tlc.transitionallifecare.org. I was perusing TLC's website the other day, and read something Julie expressed that really stayed with me:

“I've learned that community is sometimes only a concept, and even in the Buddhist sangha people tend to be very busy. Or perhaps it's that we back off from death. This I learned in hospice training and heard from my mother after my dad died – her friends suddenly didn't invite her over. Said they would, but didn't. Months went by. Maybe people don't know what to say. We're preoccupied, we forget. But suddenly, there you are without your life companion (or best friend or work partner or parent or child), very much alone. This is compounded by the isolation that results from people keeping their distance. Good intentions aside, if one doesn't follow through on lending a hand and being a friend, seclusion can result... Looking across life at someone else, please notice -- this is the time when we can benefit others in a most profound way. We can make ourselves available to listen, to offer assistance, go have a bite to eat, get out of the house with someone willing to feel, and willing to be with us. It can be difficult to 'reach out' when life is rough, and often easier to reach 'in' and offer your hand. Sometimes it's just being able to listen. So much is to be gained from this openness.”

Julie continued, “I'm asking our community to put someone else first. We are so busy, so distracted, yes tired, even self-absorbed, because that's what this life's existence can come to. To make time for those who are under the weather or just plain infirm, who are bereaved, who are unable to get around, who need help

at home, this is valuable practice—the practical application of training in compassion is just being a friend. This is called being available to be human, to embody the idea of community, to exchange self for others. It's so important. We can make a real difference in each other's lives simply by our presence."



I really relate to the truth of what Julie is saying, that reaching out to others is a practice in compassionate activity. I want be more available and open to others in this way myself.

The other day I was thinking about Genkaku Glozer, how he lived in a little cabin on Philip's land during his last few years, and how he died there, with much care from Philip and others in the sangha during the months of his illness and at the time of his death. Remembering that does

my heart good. Others, including Ron Fidler and Sarah Rose, have been well cared for at the time of dying. May this continue. May we be kind to each other. May we be supportive and gentle with each other. May we help each other.

--Gaea Yudron

CARTOON CORNER, BECAUSE IT'S GOOD TO LAUGH



SANGHA NEWS

Gaea Yudron, editor

Sangha News is published bi-monthly. The next issue will appear in August. If you have something you would like to contribute, please email me at gaea.laughing@gmail.com. Deadline for the next issue is July 15th. Past issues of the Sangha News are available on links at the Tashi Choling website, www.tashicholing.org.

Please keep Ani Legshe and Antal Toth in your prayers