

Tashi Choling Sangha News June 2019

Sangha Spotlight: Richard Schwindt



Photo by Ani Yeshe

In 1968, the big event in Richard Schwindt's young life was being drafted into the Army and flown to Saigon, Vietnam. A war was going on but, fortunately, during his 15 months there, Richard never harmed anyone and no one harmed him. But he did have an immediate introduction to Buddhism as he waited to receive his assignment from his captain. Looking out the window, he saw soldiers loading black body bags into metal boxes so that the bodies could be shipped home to families. Then on a small bookshelf in the room where he waited, he saw a book titled, "The Life of the Buddha." He picked it up and

started reading. What a potent moment. Richard's assignment for six months was flying nightly reconnaissance over the city. High in the air, he saw a large statue of Amitabha in the rice paddies, lit by the moon.

Back in the US, Richard was working in a McDonald's in the Portland area. Coincidentally, Jary Weinberger, his boss's daughter, was a very good friend of Sangye Khandro. As Richard recalled, "Jary mentioned that Sangye was coming through town with this Nyingmapa lama and they were having a little ngondro retreat in a cabin at Government Camp at Mt. Hood. So I was invited to come up there. Seven or eight people attended. The cabin had a big living room and one bedroom. Sangye and Rinpoche stayed in the bedroom and we all crashed in the living room for a couple of nights, and Rinpoche taught ngondro. That is where I met Rinpoche. He was a very, very young 50 year old and we were in our 20s. He seemed like the best thing going for us to relate to, more than anything else in the world. I felt like my whole life had changed. Something had lifted from the Vietnam War. I walked home on the railroad tracks one full moon night. To me, it seemed that Gyatrul Rinpoche absorbed a lot of my negative stuff and made it go away. He drew it out and dispelled it. I had a feeling of emptiness and devotion for the person who had done that. My mind was different after that. Rinpoche and Sangye Khandro made the dharma seem more accessible. You could be in a family and still be a Buddhist."



In the 80s: (l.to r.) Shandor Weiss, Richard Schwindt, Gyatrul Rinpoche, Marti Ambrose

Soon after, Richard bought a house in the Sellwood area of Portland. On his first visit there, Rinpoche taught for five days. "He stayed at my house with Sangye Khandro. That is where I first heard that he was looking for his own place to build a monastery," Richard commented. Soon, Richard became involved with the effort to find land for a retreat center in southern Oregon. One day, with Rinpoche and several others, he took an exploratory walk on the land that is now Tashi Choling. A few days later, Sangye Khandro told Richard that Rinpoche thought the land would make a good site for a country retreat center. She suggested that Richard move forward. Hearing that, Richard wasted no time. "I got in the car and drove all night," he recalled. "I slept in my truck up in Eugene, where the owner of that piece of land was living. Then I talked to her the next morning and basically made a verbal agreement to buy the land. Instantly. Doing that was the first big meaningful thing in my life. It seemed natural to do it." Negotiations proceeded smoothly; and thanks to the generosity of Marlee Heathcote and Richard Schwindt, fifty-six acres of the former Rainbow Star

commune's land were purchased on October 16, 1979 and named Yeshe Nyingpo Country Center. "Marlee Heathcote and I made the commitment to put a down payment on the land and make payments. So we did that for a couple of years, and then Marlee decided to be generous and she paid off the balance herself," Richard reported. Richard became a key figure in the land's development and has remained vitally involved with Tashi Choling's development and maintenance to the present time. He has done an enormous amount of work. He dug ditches, worked on many of the retreat center's construction projects, and served as Rinpoche's attendant at times.

In the fall of 1984, Richard went to Nepal. "It was different there then, with very few motor vehicles. The air was really clear," Richard recalled. At the time, Gyatrul Rinpoche was in Kathmandu and advised Richard to focus on doing his ngondro. Richard rented a small place near the Boudhanath Stupa and spent the next five and a half months practicing, a four hour session in the morning and another four hours in the afternoon. Every day he took a little outing at lunch, checking his mail, eating at a Chinese restaurant, and reading the international newspaper. During his retreat, Richard dreamed that Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche was touching his feet and thanking him for doing his ngondro. Soon after, he heard the news that Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche would be doing a 10-day retreat at Maratika Cave. Richard asked Gyatrul Rinpoche if he should cut his ngondro retreat a little short in order to attend. "You will never have that

opportunity again,” Rinpoche said, urging him to go to Maratika. Richard and Dominique Shelton paid for Yangthang Rinpoche’s airfare to Maratika, where Dominique served as his attendant.

In 1986, Richard was fortunate to spend four months at Penor Rinpoche’s Namdroling Monastery. One night from his guest room window, he saw that Penor Rinpoche was showing a Hindi movie to some of his monks in the back yard. “I had discursive thoughts and judgment about it, and I thought, ‘That’s just not right.’” The next morning, Penor Rinpoche was standing in the hallway near Richard’s room. Without preamble, Penor Rinpoche told Richard, “I show them the movies so they do not go to town.” Lama Khyenno--the lama knows.

Richard loves Asia and has traveled there at least 10 times. He had many trekking adventures and dharma experiences in Nepal and India. Often his travels took place during the winter months, when Rinpoche and Sangye Khandro were also there. During those times, he was fortunate to have family style time with Rinpoche and Sangye, enjoying spontaneous picnics and visits to Rinpoche’s lama friends. These days, Richard lives in a beautiful Victorian house shaded by big cedar trees in the small town of Hornbrook, California, which, as Richard has said jokingly, is “not for everyone.” Hornbrook remains undiscovered and rural, a small, quirky, peaceful place to live.



Building roof of East Wing

In June, Richard is scheduled to have surgery in Portland in order to improve the healthy functioning of his dear heart. Please keep him in your prayers. May he live many more vibrant years among us. Thank you, Richard, for all the ways you have contributed to the founding, development, and flowering of Tashi Choling.



Next at TLC Film Series: Bardo Teachings by Gyatrul Rinpoche

In June and July, TLC Transitional Life Care's monthly free film series will present Bardo teachings by Gyatrul Rinpoche.

You are invited to attend these on June 23 and July 14th, 5-7pm, at the Ashland Library's Gresham Room.



Cartoon Corner



About Sangha News

Sangha News appears bi-monthly and is sent out by email with the Tashi Choling bulletin.

You can read past issues by accessing links on the home page of our website, www.tashicholing.org. It's a great way to get to know sangha members a little better.

The next issue will appear in August. Please send your article suggestions, cartoons, etc. to editor Gaea Yudron gaea.laughing@gmail.com by July 15th.