Sun Mountain Zen

Mat Chat

June 2013

Happy 10th anniversary!

In November 2013 it will be ten years since Sun Mountain Zen (SMZ) was founded in Brisbane by Meryn and Cecilie Lander, dharma successors of Roselyn Stone. Today SMZ is a vibrant and dynamic sangha with three teachers (Meryn and Cecilie, and an assistant teacher Sue Wolter. SMZ has grown from humble beginnings in East Brisbane to become a vibrant and active Zen community with four groups throughout Brisbane and Kenilworth involving members from not only Queensland but also interstate and even overseas.

The edition of Mat chat is dedicated to Sei'an An Roselyn Stone the teacher who travelled from Canada each year to bring the dharma to Brisbane and teach, among others, Meryn and the founders of SMZ Meryn and Cecilie. This period is an important and important part of our lineage and I hope you enjoy reading Roselyn's account of it.

The Sun Mountain Zen Sangha thanks you Sei'an.

"Look right now the reflection of the moon in a cold river crystal, and nothing else happened at all."
Ven Mitsu Jan Sano

Mountain Moon Sangha, a brief history

by Sei'an Roselyn Stone

It is the moments leading to the mid-day meal. I am seated on the Teacher's cushion in the Dharma Hall. I am tired. I have been for some ten years now: a profound tiredness lower left leg severely limits the amount of time I can sit on cushions on the floor. This zendo in the home of two of my Successors, Meryn and Cecilie Lander arrives into the Family Room complete with a grand piano, TV comfy chairs and a small puma organ. The first time I saw it way back in 1991, I was in Brisbane for the ordination of my brother and a little Kiwi Buddhist teacher over a session for the Brisbane Zen Group. Meryn walked into the room, big

airy room and said: "This would make a great zendo!" Not a self-fulfilling prophecy, that, for it was much to happen between that moment and this quiet just-before-mealtime one in sesshin (June 2010).

First Year

The BZG would have to decide after taking part in that first sesshin in 1991 that they did, indeed, want to extend the invitation to be their Roshi — or not. Some were not ready for that. Til then, for some twelve years they'd run their own show, so to speak, with considerable assistance from Dharma Brother (so-called because he had been Albert Kwan's Dharma Heir) to lead their annual sesshin. They had been advised, however, by AMA Samy, my Dharma brother and at the time Cecilie and Meryn's teacher, that they should be very serious about their practice they needed to find and commit to a full-time teacher. He suggested me and the rest, as they say, is history.

They took the plunge, invited me out for a six-month residency in 1992 and set me up in a house in Kent street in the Brisbane Suburbs which they created a beautiful zen living quarters for me. And within a month of my arrival, most of them greatly regretted the decision.

Then, we'd have to survive a split.

The next year, on my way out to Australia for my second six-month residency, I stopped in Hawaii and met another Dharma brother (so-called because he had been Albert Kwan's Heir and authorized by the same Zen Master), Robert Aitken Roshi, at his still-under-construction Diamond Sangha. Robert Aitken Roshi was keen to see the Brisbane Sangha flourish, and spoke since its inception and when we went for lunch together he leaned toward me his eyes twinkling mischievously and asked me, "Do you want to take over from Meryn?"

So I told him of the defections — long-time members who'd decided it was more fun, if that's what you call a dharma practice, to "Do their own thing." Heading to my second six-month stint, I knew I would serve as Tanto, Jikidō, Inō, Tenzō and Jisha (which, many years later I would discover my students with characteristic Kiwi irreverence would call Santa's little helper) and the chants to be used was not something they'd expected to have to do. Others, who felt drawn to the practice, had left to do their own thing. Meryn and Cecilie had moved to Nundah, but taking out a six-month lease on a house in Kent Street in Brisbane's Spring Hill and living with a senior BZG member who had formally become Jisha's student. Bob smiled conceiving and said that in his now-complete experience this was quite characteristic of groups that decided to get a teacher after having functioned on their own for some time. It had happened to him many times over. "They bring you in," he said, "and then decide it was better without you. Too stuck in their ego."

In the event, the group had voted 13 to 12 to invite me back. I suggested at a meeting of all members that I'd like to see a commitment from them to the Way, to the Buddha road taken seriously — mine and theirs. I would practice Every Day Zen, the BZG had perhaps lost the work of fostering Zen Brisbane. Why not discuss it and let two groups arise that I'd teach, the Moungtain Moon Sangha and the Every Day Zen Group? And that's what they did — admirably amicably.

And another split.

At the end of the second residency, a long-time BZG member and now disciple of mine, departed. Keen to have a monastic-type practice established in Brisbane, he had discussed with a friend the idea of forming a monastery in Brisbane and then moving to Kenilworth in Coorparoo. "Like my teacher and his teacher," I told him. "I am committed to making Brisbane my home, I'm not interested in establishing a monastery." Disappointed, he moved out in the world. I was not interested in establishing a monastery, Brisbane, to my judgment, setting up and enforcing all the rules that monastic life requires would be done more well in Kenilworth. Years later, he would establish a monastery in the United States, Sahra Sunin, who would authorize him to have — in fact, lead — a monastery and took a few years of now-very-well-trained disciples with him. The remaining members retired to the nearby MacDonald's to consider their options, took a deep breath and invited me back a third time — and we never looked back.

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