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 Mervyn and Cecile Lander, dharma successors of Roseryn Stone. Today SMZ includes a third teacher (dharma successor of Mervyn) and two, and again soon, tent 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 Roseryn Stone the teacher who travelled from Canada each year to bring the dharma to Brisbane and teach, among others, Mervyn and the founders of SMZ Mervyn and Cecile. This period is a very special and important part of our lineage and I hope you enjoy reading Roseryn's account of it.

The Sun Mountain Zen Sangha thanks you Sei'an.

Mountain Moon Sangha, a brief history

by Sei'an An Roseryn Stone

It is the moments leading to the mid-day meal I am seated on the teacher's cushion and, I'm sure, I'm not the only one who thinks for some ten years now, I am confronted with 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, Mervyn and Cecile Lander where once the Family Room complete with a grand piano, TV comfy chairs and a small pump organ. The first time I saw it way back in 1991, I was sitting with Roshi Kennedy and my teacher over a session for the Brisbane Zen Group. Roshi walked into the room, lay down on my 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 Zen

The BZG would have to decide after taking part in that first sesshin in 1991 that they did, indeed, want to extend the practice period to be the best that it can, or, as Roshi would say, 'Tit then, for some twelve years they'd run their own show, so to speak, with considerable support from Roshi and Dharma successors Mervyn and Mary Kennedy who, in turn, helped lead their annual sesshin. They had been advised, however, by AMA Samy, my Dharma brother and at the time Cecile and Mervyn's teacher, that it would 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 Acacia Ridge with two Zen practitioners who'd been practising and sitting long 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 another Dharma brother (so called because we had been ordained by the same authorized by the same Zen Master), Robert Aitken Roshi, at his still-under-construction Diamond Sangha. Aitken Roshi wasn't seen to be in the best of health and, having only since its inception and when we went for lunch together he leaned toward me his eyes glittering mischievously and asked, "Do you think you can run the BZG?"

So I told him of the defections — long-time members who'd decided it was more fun, if that's the right word, to do their own thing. Yielding to his persuasion, I decided to stay and sitting with a senior BZG member who had formally become Jisha's student. Bob smiled convalescing and said that in his now-considerable experience this was characteristic of groups that decided to get a teacher after having functioned on their own for some time. It had happened to him twice once. "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, if I was to be their teacher, I would need to be free to teach as I saw fit and challenge — mine and mine alone to practice Every Day Zen, the BZG had perhaps been its work of fostering Zen in Brisbane. Why not dissolve it and let two phone-in-sitting groups, the one, the Mountain Moon Sangha and the Every Day Zen Group? And that's what they did — admirably amicably.

And another split.

Back at 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 the matter with me during my previous residency and had formed a house (Mountain Moon) in Coorparoo. "Like the abbot and his teacher," I told him, in comfort and in retrospect. Mountain Moon Sangha, the Every Day Zen Group and Mountain Moon (Coorparoo) — three groups who had, in my judgment, settling up and enforcing all the rules that monastic life requires would be done in the other two groups. Thus, the Kosan Ashram was born. Based in the United States, Sheng Sahrin Sunim, who would authorize him to have — in fact, lead — a monastery and took a few years of now-very-well-established Kosan Ashram. The remaining members moved 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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Third time lucky.

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Fourth time's the charm.

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Eighth time's the charm.

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Ninth time's the charm.

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Eleventh time's the charm.

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Thirteenth time's the charm.

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Fourteenth time's the charm.

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Seventeenth time's the charm.

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Twenty time's the charm.

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Twenty-first time's the charm.

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Twenty-third time's the charm.

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Twenty-seventh time's the charm.

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Twenty-ninth time's the charm.

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Thirtieth time's the charm.

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On the 29th November 2013, Sun Mountain Zen will be 10 years old!

The Sun Mountain Zen Sangha – a short history

By Gōan-an Cecilia & Gōan-an Mervyn Lander

Was it really by chance that we happened to hear a Sunday afternoon interview with Fr AMA Samy SJ and Zen Teacher on the ABC radio as we sat outside Redcliffe Hospital one late Sunday afternoon in mid-1991? AMA Samy had been ordained in the Zen tradition and authorized by the renowned Yamada Kōun Roshi in the Sanbō-Kōdan Lineage in Japan.

There is a zen saying: *When the student is ready, the teacher appears!* We became AMA Samy's students for some three years. We delighted in his ability to 'transcend' two great traditions without conflict, indeed with an amazing spiritual clarity, depth and simplicity. We followed his annual retreats and co-founded, with Roslyn Rhodes of the Brisbane Zen Group, *Zen for Everyday Life* and formed some years later, Mountain Moon.

However, Fr AMA Samy could only come to Australia once a year. He suggested the possibility of his Dharma sister, Sei'an Roseryn Stone coming to Australia. You will see that Sei'an Roseryn Stone was the first disciple of Mountain Moon Zen Sangha at the point. Once she started a six month residence in Brisbane, we sat with her and with AMA Samy whenever possible. In consultation with her, it was decided that we return visit to Australia, we asked if we could each become her student as this gave us opportunity for both the practice of zazen and also for regular dokusan. Roseryn Stone was Mountain Moon Zen Sangha's first student. Perhaps because it was such a unique opportunity to have a Zen Teacher available at such close hand, we practiced very intensively and were quite competitive. While Roseryn tried to run a strict zendo, there was always lots of laughter, occasional tears – and all of us valued this a precious time.

Because we had frequent and intense zen training, [it was 'full on' zen during each six month residency] we both completed *shitsunai* (Examination in the room) with our teacher, Sei'an Roseryn Stone in the Kōan Introduction to the Gateless Barrier in Brisbane in November 1993. Then we were invited to attend the annual Sanbō-kōdan Zen Teacher's *kenshusai* which was usually held in Kyoto. We took our Teacher's *kenshusai* as memorable opportunities to get to know the Sanbō-Kōdan zen network around the globe as well as to experience traditional Japanese Zen culture. Roseryn Stone, Mervyn and Cecilia Lander, the founders of our teacher, attended *sesshin* in Madrid (with Aena-Maria Roshi) and in Kamakura (with Kubota Roshi). In 2007, Mountain Moon and Sun Mountain groups combined to host the 2007 Sanbō-kōdan Kenshusai event in Brisbane.

We were Assistant Zen teachers for three years in the Mountain Moon Sangha. On 17th November, we were ordained as Zen teachers by the Sanbō-Kōdan Lineage Teacher Joko Beck and given the teaching names, *Gōan-an Cecilia* and *Gōan-an Mervyn*. On 31st December 2003, *Sei'an An Roseryn Stone Roshi* presented us each with the Certificate of Succession.

After much discussion, we decided to call our new group Sun Mountain Zen Sangha. We had been in the Mountain Moon Sangha and we decided to leave the Mountain Moon name, *something new!* that expressed Zen in the particular place of sunny Queensland but which also connected us to Mountain Moon Sangha.

We are indebted to Steven Cassidy who painted our Logo. Stephen has willantly attempted to teach both of us some of the skills of Chinese Brush painting.

29th November 2003 is the Foundation Day of the Sun Mountain Sangha when we had the Ceremony of Succession with six attendees. An 'event guest book' was placed in the zendo and it now contains the names of all who have attended.

On the 29th August, Roshi Roseryn Stone Roshi joined us for a *Zeekai* at SMZS and she wrote, *"An auspicious day indeed! A visit to the Sun Mountain Zendo of Gō'an Ken and Gō'an Jen. The Awakened Way is unsurpassable; we vow to embody it fully! Gassho and love. Sei'an An."*

From 2004 until 2007, there was an annual combined sesshin with Sun Mountain and Mountain Moon Sangha members. Sei'an An Roseryn's last visit (so far) to Brisbane in 2010 provided the opportunity for a wonderful combined Mini-sesshin over the June long weekend where we celebrated the gift of Sei'an An Roseryn's teaching and guidance.

The SMS Zen calendar has incorporated a one day *Zeekai* or a 2 day intensive each month together with an annual sesshin. Since 2008, an annual three day mini-sesshin has grown across the long weekend in June. A week of summer *Flexi-sesshin* was added to the calendar in January 2009. This is a week's sesshin, beginning with a Saturday morning and finishing early evening; participants come and go (e.g. to work) each day; there has been a different theme each year – e.g. The Ox Herding Pictures, the Precepts, the Diamond Sutra. Zen in the market place had participants practice on buses and shopping centers around Brisbane! It commonly attracts a trip to the Kenilworth Art Gallery! Great fun.

Regular Monday night sitting commenced in 2004 and continues in the St Paul's Church hall in Vulture St, East Brisbane. A smaller group meets for zazen and dokusan on Thursday nights at Aspley Baptist Church. Regular sitting was established by Ann Kerr in the Old Catholic Church hall at Samford Village in April 2009 and in the same year, Gōan & Sue Wolter commenced sitting in the Catholic church hall in Kenilworth on Wednesday nights. We have had various programs over this decade leading the Introductory Zen Seminar in the Samford area. It also developed into a Buddhist Winter and Summer Seminar which was conducted over many months and years.

Sun Mountain Zen Sangha has as its primary purpose the facilitation of Zen meditation practice which also includes socially-engaged outreach. The Inside Zen group, initiated and led by Anne Hay-Hess, commenced in the Inside Women's High Security Prison in 2008. It is supported by members and teachers of the Sun Mountain Zen Sangha and by the Mountain Moon Sangha. It continued in this format for three years. Currently, the Inside Zen group at Woodford is undergoing a substantial change in program delivery but the aim is to expand our offering as a result of our experience over the last several years.

The Sun Mountain Zen Community incorporated as SMZ Association Inc. a non-profit organization on the 13th April, 2006. It is managed by a committee of elected members who carry out various responsibilities to provide a harmonious and efficient organization.

Throughout these ten years, it has been our great privilege to offer teaching and to continue our practice in the excellent company of our Sangha members. Such is the nature of practice that on the 11th June, 2012, Ann Hess was appointed as an Authorized Zen Teacher of Sun Mountain Sangha and *Gōan-ken* Mervyn Lander's Dharma Successor. At the *Annual Sesshin* in Essex, on the 11th August 2012, Anne Hess was appointed an Authorized Zen Teacher of the Sanbō-Kōdan and given the teaching name *Shu'un-ken*. Anne's teaching is based in the Samford area. It is also dedicated to the Inside Zen Prison Program. Congratulations and thanks to Anne for her commitment to this program.

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We continue to welcome so many people who come to explore Zen and to see if it speaks to their *kokoro* [heart-mind] at the time. SMS has a small but solid core of regular practitioners; there are many fellow travellers who, perhaps join for a while then pass through. We hold a 'revolving-door' approach: folk are very welcome to come and see and 'taste' zen for themselves. Likewise they are very free to leave if it is not for them at this time – they go with our blessing and good wishes, and in the sure knowledge that, [to quote Alan Kneighley's book title] 'Nothing is lost and nothing is found'. Nothing is separate.

To conclude this short history of the first decade of the Sun Mountain Sangha, we are delighted to record here our profound gratitude, firstly to our teachers Sei'an An Roseryn Stone Roshi and Mary Kennedy Roshi, secondly to each and every member of the Sun Mountain Sangha and to the teachers and students of the Mountain Moon Sangha in Brisbane and Canada, and finally, to the historic lineage of teachers that has nurtured the teaching that we have received.

It is an incomparable gift.

Gassho
Gōan-ken and *Gōan-an*
28.5.2013

Dates to remember!!

July 13: Zenkai

August 5th—9th: Annual Sesshin. (Mercy Place)

If you would like to submit an article for Mat Chat please email it to m_mwilliams@bigpond.com.