

Katherine Thanas

March 17, 1927 ~ June 24, 2012

SANTA CRUZ, CA – Sobun Katherine Thanas, renowned dharma teacher, Founding Teacher for Monterey Bay Zen Center and Abbot of the Santa Cruz Zen Center, died at home on June 24, 2012. She was 85.

Born in Berkeley, California, Katherine was deeply influenced by her family's Greek roots and the early death of her mother. Katherine began her Zen practice in January 1967 at Sokoji, the Japanese Buddhist Temple in Japantown, San Francisco when she attended a meditation session with a friend. On her third visit, while struggling with sitting still, she had a breakthrough experience, and "was sitting on the ceiling" for the rest of the period.



From 1967 on, Katherine was a devoted student and teacher of Buddhism. She trained with Suzuki Roshi (founder of the Soto Zen lineage of Buddhism in the West) at Sokoji, San Francisco Zen Center, Tassajara, and Green Gulch Farm. She received lay ordination from Suzuki Roshi, was ordained as a priest by Zentatsu Baker Roshi in 1975, and received shiho (dharma transmission) from Tenshin Reb Anderson in 1988. She founded the Monterey Bay Zen Center in 1988, became head teacher of the Santa Cruz Zen Center in 1989, and was installed as the Abbot of the Santa Cruz Zen Center in 2002. While reducing her responsibilities in 2009, she continued as head teacher for Monterey Bay Zen Center, continued teaching classes and retreats, leading meditation periods, and supervising her students' training in both Monterey and Santa Cruz.

Katherine's legacy as a Zen teacher is her unusual ability to translate formal monastic training into meaningful understanding of our everyday life. Her dharma lineage includes shiho (dharma transmission) to Eugene Bush, Patrick Teverbaugh, Robert Reese, and Kathy Whilden, and lay entrustment to Tey Roberts, Patricia Wolff, and Susan McDonald. She ordained eight priests and dozens of lay practitioners.

She is survived by nephews Steve Lansky of Cincinnati, Ohio, David Lansky of Burlington, Vermont, and close friends, Rosy Penhallow of Watsonville, Teena Gruman and Michael Weissman of Monterey, Suzy Spradlin of Oakland, and Pamela Jackson of Pasadena. Katherine was predeceased by her father, Vacilios Athanasiadis (Bill Thanas); her mother, Smaragda Daros (Mary Thanas); and sister, Dona Lansky of Cincinnati.

Funeral services will be held at the Santa Cruz Zen Center, 115 School Street, on Sunday, July 1, 2012, 2:30pm, with a reception following at Holy Cross Church. An additional funeral service for the San Francisco Zen Center community, will take place at either the San Francisco Zen Center or Green Gulch, in a month or two. Please check the SCZC website for an upcoming announcement (www.sczc.org).

In lieu of flowers, her family and close friends request donations be made to The Santa Cruz Zen Center, The Monterey Bay Zen Center or one of the many organizations she supported (a list is available on the Santa Cruz Zen Center website, www.sczc.org).