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Wind Bell

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Contents

Articles and Features

Introduction to this issue of *Wind Bell*, p.3

In Response to the War by *Sojun Mel Weitsman*, p.4

Mitsu Suzuki Sensei, p. 16

Seventy-Seven Years of My Life by *Mitsu Suzuki Sensei*, p. 17

Excerpts from *Temple Dusk*, p. 24

Stories from Suzuki Sensei's Students, p. 28

News

Peter Bailey, p. 13

Zen Center News, p. 14

Lectures

Thoughts on the Relationship of Teacher and Student by *Sojun Mel Weitsman*, p. 5

Sesshin Lecture by *Zoketsu Norman Fischer*, p. 38

The True Dragon by *Suzuki Roshi*, p. 43

Cover calligraphy and poem by *Mitsu Suzuki Sensei*



Mitsu Suzuki Sensei is celebrating her seventy-seventh birthday this year. A seventy-seventh birthday is called *kiju*, meaning "joy of long life," and is a very special occasion for a Japanese person. With great warmth and boundless gratitude for all she has shared with us, we at Zen Center offer her a deep bow.

In honor of her life and teaching, Gregory Wood and Kaz Tanahashi Sensei are translating her poems into English. The book, a bi-lingual edition entitled *Temple Dusk* is forthcoming from Parallax Press in the summer of 1991. An excerpt from the book is included in this issue, along with several articles about her life.

Mitsu Suzuki Sensei

Mitsu Suzuki Sensei was born April 23, 1914, in Shizuoka City, Japan, into the Sakai family. People wondered if she had come mouth first out of her mother's body, since she loved storytelling and would take main roles in dramas. After studying at Anzai Primary School in her native city, she received a four-year education at Shizuoka Prefectural Girls' High School. She also took private lessons studying sewing, the koto, and flower arrangement.

In 1966 at the age of 22, Mitsu was married to Masaharu Matsuno, a reconnaissance soldier on a seaplane carried by the battleship Nagato. The next year, when she was seven months pregnant, she had to see her husband off to battle. The following year their daughter Harumi was born. Soon after seeing Harumi's first picture, Masaharu was killed in action in China.

When Harumi was three, Mitsu started working for a kindergarten. She was trained as a teacher at Nara Womens' College for one year with the help of the War Widow Aid Association. During World War II she worked for a prefectural kindergarten-nursery school. After air raids by US bombers started, she and her two assistants would have to take the children into the bunker every day. The entire city of Shizuoka was burned in 1945.

After the war she was intending to stay as the director of the kindergarten for the rest of her career. But Shunryu Suzuki, abbot of Rinso-in Zen Temple in Yaizu, heard about her reputation as a teacher. He requested persistently that she help restore the historical kindergarten attached to his temple. Finally she accepted his offer and moved to Yaizu in 1949. His wife died later, leaving three children, Yasuko, Hoitsu and Otohiro.

In 1958 she married Shunryu who was 57. The following year Shunryu left for San Francisco to be abbot of Soko-ji Temple. Mitsu stayed in Japan and took care of the children and two kindergartens. In 1961 she moved to San Francisco, hoping to bring him back to Japan soon, but she has resided in the United States ever since. "I went for wool but ended up shorn." When Shunryu Suzuki Roshi died in 1971, she remained at San Francisco Zen Center; she taught tea ceremony to students until she retired in March 1991.



Okusan's 77th birthday party

Seventy-seven Years of My Life

Mitsu Suzuki

The best part of my life has been that I could experience love as a mother. Although I live in the United States, the thought that I have a daughter in Japan has always enriched my life.

I was raised without a mother, so I was hungry for a mother's love. As a child I had to take care of my clothes and everything myself. I was a determined and proud person, and I didn't like that part of myself; I wanted to be a warm-hearted person. I wanted to develop my spiritual life, so after I finished girl's high school I went to the Christian church and was baptized. My family members didn't like me going to church; they said if I became a Christian I'd have less chance to be married.

I got married in 1936. My husband was in the Navy-Air Force reconnaissance. Neither of us had any idea that the war between China and Japan was going to start. The next year, on the day of the Bon festival, July 13, the war broke out and he had to leave. He was stationed on a warship that carried seaplanes. I was pregnant at that time. Every day was a horrible experience, because the wives of other soldiers received telegrams that their hus-

bands had been killed. There was news on the radio that they bombed some parts of China and two airplanes did not come back. I thought that one of them might be his airplane. Then my mother-in-law received a telegram that he had been killed.

One of my husband's jobs was to choose targets for bombs. When he was going on a mission to China I would write to him: "Please remember that these people in China also have wives and children; I would like you to target rice fields instead of cities and towns. Drop bombs to surprise the snails in the rice fields."

About three years ago we had a fifty years memorial service for him and I told this story to the friends who attended. Someone said, "Did you really write that kind of letter?" And I said, "Yes I did. The suffering of Chinese people would be the same as my suffering."

My first husband was a very cheerful and mature person. He was very thoughtful; for example, he took care of all the details when my father visited us. I wanted my daughter to be like him and not like me. When I was pregnant and he was away, I was sending messages to the child in my womb—sending my wish that this child would be like him. And I am blessed because actually Harumi's nature is similar to her father's, although she never met him.

Looking back on seventy-seven years of my life, my ideal was the life of marriage. Unfortunately I was only a wife for ten years altogether during my two marriages. But I feel fortunate; both of my husbands were very fine people.

I'm very grateful that while in America I have been living in a Buddhist temple. My friends tell me where I live is so special, not like typical American society. I don't know life outside this community and it's been wonderful to be here.

I could not really teach tea ceremony in a formal way—I didn't have the correct tea utensils or formal tea room. And I didn't have enough knowledge myself to teach formal tea ceremony. But because I was studying Zen, I wanted my students to grasp the heart of Zen. That is, in a very narrow space, a one mat room or two mat room, you establish a universe. Here there is harmony between host and guest. The host is always thoughtful of the guest, thinking how to create and serve delicious tea to the guest. The guest, instead of trying to look for the host's mistake, watches and wishes for the host to make delicious tea. So there is a real warm harmony; this is the spirit of tea ceremony. In this country, people tend to think of their own matters and not worry about others' business. I wanted people here to learn this spirit of harmony.



Buddha's birthday in Japantown

I'm very fortunate that my students are all Zen students. They probably understand the spirit of tea more than other Americans. Among tea teachers, even in Japan, few people want to study Zen, which is very strange because tea ceremony started from Zen practice. Dogen Zenji said, "Dignified bearing is itself Buddha Dharma." He taught that everything we do in our daily life—how we converse with each other and how we take meals, go to the bathroom, how we use water—all is Zen. Tea ceremony is just like that: however and wherever you meet someone else, being fully thoughtful of the other is most important. That is the mastery of tea ceremony.

My students have been studying, maybe harder than Japanese students, although they have many difficulties like pain in their legs sitting seiza. Because of his age, Issan (Issan Dorsey, late abbot of Hartford Street Zen Center) would often forget the movements. I would just hit his hand to correct him, asking him what was next. He would say, "I don't know." So I would say "I've told you this a million times—please say you forgot, not that you don't know!" A Japanese student who spilled tea would say, "Oh, I'm extremely sorry, my mistake". Here I would just clean up for my students. They wouldn't even say thank you. They might have thought that this was some accident, not their mistake. I was often shocked with their reactions. If I asked them to say they were sorry, they would look puzzled, wondering why I'm asking them this.

One real challenge is that people here are not really trained from childhood in precise physical movements like using right hand or left hand. In American education you don't need to learn this. All movements in tea ceremony involve right and left. But my students are really open for suggestions and instructions, and they have been following my instructions in a faithful way.

I first asked Hojo (Shunryu Suzuki Roshi) what he would think of doing haiku when we were in Tassajara. It was about 1970, shortly before he died. He thought it was a wonderful idea. I started writing haiku and sent some to Japanese magazines, but then he became very sick and I could not do that.

Hojo had also originally encouraged me to study tea ceremony and bought me an issue of a magazine featuring the tea ceremony. I started after that. Hojo left me these two things: tea ceremony and haiku. These two arts have enriched my life and have also enabled me to stay here. Otherwise I would have had nothing to do and my life here would have been very difficult.

The best thing about haiku is that you see things clearly, and appreciate the wonder and beauty of nature. Gratitude for the air, sun and water comes from appreciation of nature. Being aware of how, in such a deep way, we are enriched by nature. You have to see things in nature in a very honest way, and you have to write in a direct straightforward way. To penetrate our self, and to cleanse our self—haiku has that function.



Okusan with Taiko drummers



Katagiri Roshi, Okusan and Suzuki Roshi

Normally in Japan there are leaders of haiku groups and you work together as a group. Since I'm here just by myself, I write haiku by myself. To send haiku to magazines to be evaluated is the usual way to write and develop your skill, but I started out when I was older, and I just write in my own way. I don't care about being accepted or having awards. I'm a very poor haiku student in that way.

For example, my haiku are appreciated by *Eiheiji* magazine, I guess because they're often Buddhist; but in haiku groups in San Francisco my poems are not selected so often. I'm not doing so well here.

Before Hojo died, when he was very sick, he asked me to go back to Japan. He wanted to be re-ordained, to renounce his life as a householder again. He wished to devote himself to his students twenty-four hours a day. I said "Hojo-san, if you are getting well, I will respect your wish, but I cannot leave you here so sick. Who would cook Japanese meals for you?" I wrote to Hoichi (Hoitsu Suzuki Roshi, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi's son and Dharma heir) and asked for his opinion. He wrote, "Mother, please stay in America and take care of him." Hoichi wrote to both Hojo and me and said that I should stay. So Hojo gave up his idea. He didn't bring it up again.

I said to Hojo, "After you die, what shall I do?"

"Stay here and help these people."

"How can I help them? I've only been able to help them because I've been with you."



Della Goertz and Okusan

Hojo said, "You are an honest and fair person, so you can help them." Even after twenty years, I feel grateful every day for his trust.

Hojo said to his American students, "It's all yours; American Zen is all yours," and I feel exactly that way. I have taught tea ceremony at Zen Center, but Zen Center has its own life and it's beyond my opinion. Here at Zen Center we see new people all the time. I feel that I am friends with the many people here even though I often don't know their names. People are coming from all over the world; lately we see more Asian people. When I see Tenshin-san and Mel-san, I ask them to take good care of Zen Center, that's all. And when I see Baker-san, I also say please take care. It is wonderful that people come from various countries looking for the Way.

By the end of March I will stop teaching tea, and pass my students on to other teachers. Students can choose their own teachers; some may choose not to continue. At that time I'll be withdrawing from any official position in the tea organization, and will continue as a member. In April, I will have no work and I will have to see how I feel and what I want to do. I've taken care of myself for 77 years and I feel that is enough. My life has been good and it's all right if I don't wake up tomorrow morning.

I have had my full life so every day I pray to the Buddha that I will die without troubling others, while I can still take care of myself. It's a kind of responsibility of doctors, monks and lawyers to establish a system whereby one can choose the best time to end his or her life. I think this is a system that should be legalized. This may sound strange to young people, but this is how I really feel at this moment. So I tell Harumi all the time that if I don't wake up tomorrow morning, if she hears that news, please say "Hurray,

mother." Even though Harumi and I have been separated, I've said everything I wanted to say, and done everything I wanted to do. She has hundreds of my letters and she feels that we are very close. She says, "Even after you go, I'll read all your letters, so we'll have a closer relationship." She is Zen, so she understands my feeling.

Tenshin-san said, "Please stay here, it will be helpful for many of us and for Zen Center." I am very grateful, but I have to think also of my own health. Most likely I'll go back to Japan. I'll be a grandmother and a great-grandmother, and become part of the family I left in Japan. I have two great-grandchildren. My daughter Harumi has visited Zen Center twice, and Hojo loved her and she enjoyed visiting here. I have a small room in Harumi's house in Japan. Harumi has two altars, one is for Hojo, and upstairs there is an altar for her father and the Matsuno family. (Harumi's husband took her father's name since she was the only child.)

First I felt very funny about coming to America. Americans and Japanese hated each other and fought each other. People in Japan expected to be killed during the war. It was strange when American people took care of us, I couldn't really understand. Of course now I feel very comfortable being here. Japanese people usually don't express their opinions so clearly. Probably I wouldn't have been able to stay here if I had been quiet and humble, a typical Japanese person. I'm very outspoken; in that way I'm like an American, and that's why I have been able to stay here among so many different kinds of people. *Translated by Kaz Tanahashi Sensei.*



Kaz Tanahashi and Okusan

Excerpts from *Temple Dusk*
by Mitsu Suzuki Sensei



Swiftly walking away
someone set a lamp
in the darkness
under the tree

Spring 1970 Tassajara

Hojo and I stay in Tassajara during the month of August. Dharma discourse evening after evening blood and sweat. Hojo and I write Haiku together.

Along the creek
finding tea room flowers
dew moistened trail

Fall 1971 Tassajara

Hojo is getting sicker and sicker. Although I try to cheer him up by putting away his bed, he still has not improved.

Narrow veranda
an acorn tumbles down
temple dusk

Fall 1971 San Francisco

Spring storm
the room is filled with incense
I sit by myself

Spring 1972 San Francisco

The ashes ceremony for Hojo is held in San Francisco on February 11. Another is held in Japan on February 17.

Narrow path
toward the cemetery
generations of abbots
fallen camellia blossoms

Spring 1972 Rinso-in Temple, Yaizu

Dusk surrounds the valley
the wooden mallet's sound
signals zazen

Summer 1973 Tassajara

Monastery gate
huge wooden bolt
fragrant wind

Summer 1976 Tassajara



Dharma discourse
bell resounds, valley
young tree leaves

Spring 1978 Green Gulch Farm

Gift of peonies
a day of old age
fulfilled

Summer 1979 San Francisco

Wearing the late teacher's
dharma robe
memorial service
frosty morning

Winter 1980 San Francisco

Shadows of tea craft
serene on the shelf
memorial tea for Rikyu

Spring 1980 San Francisco

Dialogue of bells
enters into winter
dokusan

Winter 1980 San Francisco

Zen temple
in a foreign land
growing old
green walnut

Winter 1981 Tassajara



One path
in forgetting
wholeheartedly
dew evening

Autumn 1981 Tassajara

Spring melancholy
left to the rain
tea room kettle boiling

Spring 1982 San Francisco



Summer butterfly
one meeting one lifetime
deep valley

Summer 1982 Tassajara

Year's first tea fire
hanging scroll
"nothing to possess"

January 1982 San Francisco

Ink stone cold
joy and grief
one brush

Winter 1983 San Francisco

Where is my final destination?
Foreign land
bell echoing
last evening of the year

Winter 1986 San Francisco





Zengyu Paul Discoe with Okusan

Stories from Suzuki Sensei's Students

Shunpo Blanche Hartman

In December of 1979 Suzuki Sensei came to Tassajara at the time of my *Shuso* Ceremony. Shortly after she arrived I went with her to visit Suzuki Roshi's stupa carrying incense and rice crackers and a canteen of water, and picking a few fresh flowers along the way. That year Sensei had been considering carefully whether to remain here with us or to go back to Japan; she had just recently returned from a visit to Japan.

We had walked silently up the steep trail for quite a while when Sensei said, "I have decided. I will not go back to Japan. I will stay here and continue to teach my students." I told her how happy I was and we continued walking silently toward our visit with Suzuki Roshi. A little further along she said, "Now he is a good husband for me."

When we arrived at the stupa, Okusan greeted Hojo-san in a happy conversational tone (in Japanese) and spoke with him for a bit. Though I couldn't understand the words, I feel sure she was bringing him up to date on all her news since she had last visited him, including what she had just told me. We then offered him rice crackers, fresh flowers, incense, and a lighted candle; we poured fresh water on his stone stupa, did three bows and chanted the *Hannya Shingyo* and a dedication and returned to her cabin.

Later on that same visit I went to Suzuki Sensei's cabin early in the morning to build a fresh fire for her. When I got there she was already up and had been outside. She was quite happy and excited as she said, "I'm so glad I came. I've never been to Tassajara in frosty weather before. I've already written two haiku!"

In the summer of 1980 I was summer *shuso*. One day when Suzuki Sensei was visiting I was *doshi* (officiating priest) for morning service, and my husband Lou was *doan* (ringing the bells). After service I saw Sensei; her eyes were sparkling and she had a very mischievous look. With great delight she said, "Oh! I am going to write to Hoitsu (Suzuki Roshi's son and successor in Japan). American way! *Wife* is *doshi*, *husband* is *doan*, watching, watching when to ring the bell!"

Shuun Lou Hartman

Suzuki Sensei rode home with me after her December '79 visit. We both appreciated spending the entire four hours in complete silence. Not a word was exchanged during the trip, but I could see that she was writing from time to time. After we got home she told me that she had written several haiku.

Rosy Penhallow

The first time Okusan and I drove to Pt. Reyes we sat in the back seat to eat our picnic lunch. She had prepared egg salad sandwiches better than I'd ever tasted and fixed green tea in the trusted metal pot. We walked to the light house, at the edge of a magnificent sea, stopping every so many steps as Okusan composed haiku. She descended those one-hundred-and-eight stairs and climbed back up every one of them. More haiku. It was Spring. Sunny, clear. Cormorants flying.

One day Suzuki Sensei was chopping vegetables as she was preparing lunch in her famous kitchen and accidentally cut her finger with the sharp knife she was using. She cried, "Oh, I am so sorry!", to the wounded sacred body that has been entrusted to her care.

Yvonne Rand

I have known Mrs. Suzuki since the fall of 1966, and had much direct contact starting the next year when I began to work for Zen Center, first at the temple on Bush Street and later at the City Center on Page Street. I remember the rhythm of Okusan's life as a model of calmness and thoroughness. She manifested reliability in the manner of the rising and setting of the sun and the coming and passing of the moon.

The rhythm she followed reflected the activities that invariably occurred on particular days of the week: Tuesday for tea ceremony; Thursday for washing her long heavy black hair, letting it dry during the warm hours of the afternoon; Friday for shopping and errands. One evening she would go to visit friends, another to visit Otohiro, Suzuki Roshi's son who lived in San Francisco. I always took great comfort from Okusan's example of an orderly life: she took care of the recurring features of her life well and carefully.

During the summer of 1971 I drove Roshi back and forth between San Francisco and Tassajara and sometimes Okusan would join us. Okusan took care of Suzuki Roshi and she saw all the signs of his sickness. When she and Suzuki Roshi returned to San Francisco in August that year, we began taking care of him together.

We had no meeting to decide about this. We just continued doing together what we had already done together for some years, only now our work taking care of him began to intensify and change. He went to bed in San Francisco upon his return from Tassajara and only left it once (for Richard Baker's Mountain Seat Ceremony) before he died in December. During that Fall, Okusan and I were together continuously. I would sit by his bed while she would cook, clean or tend. Sometimes he wanted his arms or legs or back rubbed to ease the stiffness from being bedridden. Sometimes he wanted a drink of water or orange juice. As his interest in eating faded, we would both search for things that would spark his appetite. Often I just sat nearby, available to get something or deliver a message or just sit. One or the other of us was with him around the clock. We became like one body in three parts.

I felt a deep connection with Okusan during this time together. We said very little to one another in sharing the process of being with Suzuki Roshi. We were connected somehow from being with him, from our mutual effort to keep him comfortable. Deep satisfaction came in just being there together. Okusan was like a mother to me in many ways. I felt an unmistakable heart connection that I could not explain. When I told her one day about my feeling for her she acknowledged that she, too, felt some deep connection which arose out of the shared journey called, "Suzuki Roshi is sick. Suzuki Roshi is dying."

That time was, in retrospect, a time of great teaching about how to die; the experience marked me forever. Whenever I see Okusan I can see in her eyes that she, too, remembers our bond and connection. Suzuki Roshi taught me, of course; I wonder if she realized how deeply she taught me as well. She was always there. She is a teacher in the very living of her life with us. She is part of the bridge between America and Japan. She is my good kind mother, helping me along the way.



Furyu Nancy Schroeder preparing tea

Michael Wenger

When my son Nathan was three years old he learned a Japanese song about Spring called *HARU NA KITA*, which he sang for Okusan. She laughed and sang along with him. One week later she gave us a tape she had made singing her favorite kindergarten songs.

One day after I had been President of Zen Center for about six months, Okusan invited me to tea. She said, "Michael-san, you have a very hard job. In Japan everyone would know and would try to help you. In America if you are a leader, everyone gives you their problems. But I know and Buddha knows how hard it is. Please come to my tea room if you need help."

Marilyn McCann Coyote

I first came to Zen Center in 1974, acutely aware of having missed the opportunity to study with Suzuki Roshi. When I heard that Suzuki Roshi's widow, Mrs. Suzuki, gave classes in tea, I felt that perhaps I was being offered a reprieve on this missed chance.

I would have taken any class that she offered, and so, in January of 1975, I attended my first tea class with Suzuki Sensei or *Okusan*, as I came to regard her. I decided to study with her for five years or so, to see if I liked tea. I knew that it would take some time to master it, but I never imagined that under her tutelage I would still be studying sixteen years later, trying to absorb the wealth of her teachings and emulate her daunting example.

At first, she was extremely strict with me. She would grab me and move me physically and rather roughly around the tea room. It was embarrassing and disorienting and soon I hated and dreaded her classes. At the same time I felt that this was just her way of teaching and that her admonishments were not personal; this gave me the necessary detachment to continue. It took me ten years to realize that in tea I had found a way to express my understanding, ten years to fully appreciate Suzuki Sensei as the greatest teacher of my life.

For her, the essence of Buddha's teaching is clearly expressed in the words of her oft-repeated maxim, "think of the other." Whether this other is human, vegetable, or animal, she skillfully manifests this teaching in even her smallest acts. To "think of the other" in every moment connects us to the great stream of life outside our own limited consciousness. Okusan's teaching has forced me to consider what it means to be fully human in the world—in these times, for this life, as a woman.

For instance, I would agonize when being offered a sweet in the course of tea ceremony. "Do I take the smallest? How do I avoid appearing greedy?" A maelstrom of questions would assail me, making me ill at ease and far from the present. "Always take the one closest to you. Sometimes it will be the biggest, sometimes the smallest," she said one day, in a way that made me see that it did not matter. Following her simple rule there is no ego involvement; there is a better feeling for everyone.

Okusan's teaching of remembering the other includes taking good care of herself. She exercises and massages herself daily. She walks regularly and has acupuncture once a week; all this is an expression of self-respect and gratitude to Buddha for her body. Once, while talking to me about caring for myself, she dropped down on her hands and toes on the tea room tatamis and demonstrated the correct way to do push-ups, with characteristic devotion to the matter at hand.

Suzuki Sensei has an original sense of style. For formal occasions, she has several elegant and beautiful kimono and obi. In the tea room and for her excursions around town, she has adapted a kind of Sixties dress, creating something completely original, functional and lovely. Her meditation "fat pants," Japanese undershirt and Japanese farmer's jacket, are made for her in subtly beautiful Japanese cottons or corduroy. The fabrics are always matched in a fascinating way and accented by an interesting belt, hand bag or shawl. This way of dressing is completely her own: practical, beautiful and elegant, bringing pleasure to others without being "showy" and expensive.

Another surprising aspect of Okusan's caring for others is flirtatiousness: a playful expression of life energy which serves to delight and make others feel "seen." It is as if she is keeping herself alive and vibrant for the pleasure of others. At times this makes her appear uncannily ageless.

One day I accompanied her on a trip to Japantown. A young Japanese man stopped in front of us, hip and fashionable with his pony tail and elegant couture clothing. He pulled off his dark glasses, spread his arms wide and shouted "Suzuki Sensei" in an ecstatic voice. She recognized him as a young man who had visited her at Zen Center years before. I watched the two of them bowing and laughing as she beamed and laughed, fussing over him outrageously. The next week an old Japanese man came to her tea room door at Zen Center. Completely at ease with herself, she was the same charming woman, making an extravagant gift of her energy and vitality. I had to marvel at her fluidity which embraced these two men from such widely different milieu.

Completely attentive to others, Okusan is able to cut through differences of culture and language and speak directly to the heart. Holding no thought about the impression she makes or her personal status, she is free to concentrate her formidable powers of observation on the person before her. In this way she is always focused on basic human values, addressing circumstances directly and naturally with her whole life. This is the most consistent and important teaching she has shared with me over the sixteen years that I have known her.

And so finally, I feel that I *have* studied with Suzuki Roshi. Okusan's love of her husband and his way is so intense and complete that she dedicated her personal life to embodying it, becoming his best student. Her eyebrows tangled with her husband's eyebrows, to paraphrase an old Zen expression, and both of their eyebrows were tangled with Buddha's. She is an inspiring teacher whose life has been a ceremony of transmission that I feel privileged to have participated in. Thank you, Okusan. A deep gassho.



Former abbot Zentatsu Richard Baker with Okusan

Fu Nancy Schroeder

During my last tea class with Suzuki Sensei, I began to cry, and she said, "I'm not dying, you know. It's very important for you to learn that things end. Things aren't always the way we'd like them to be." Once again her stern grandmotherly love was oddly soothing and required me to meet her from some deeper layer of myself. Then she talked a long time about Suzuki Roshi, who spent many weeks in her care just before he died. She spoke about how much he liked having the doors open so he could hear the *han* and bell signaling the start of zazen. As I listened to her stories, I began making her a cup of tea. I added water to the powder and started to whisk, then noticed many tiny lumps floating in the bowl. I began to apologize, and she said, "Just enjoy the lumps."

Darlene Cohen

Through the years one of the most rewarding aspects of spending time with Suzuki Sensei has been the result of her continuing fascination with the difference between "Japanese way" and "American way". She is continually weighing the very different customs between the two traditions and settling on a preference which, as far as I can tell, is based on compassion and good will toward ALL people.

For instance, she has always been a source of great encouragement for me personally, telling me that in Japan a person who was very obviously in physical difficulty would never expose themselves on the streets but would stay home all the time. She told me a Japanese person with a degenerative disease would never go about as I do, biking, walking, dancing, actually holding movement classes to show other people how to move. She said she greatly admired that aspect of "American way", that Americans always try, always have good spirit, are not ashamed of their difficulties. One day as I was riding my bike back home from the park, I crested the Haight Street hill and let fly, blissfully careening down Haight Street at full speed. Before I turned onto Laguna in a huge arc to avoid traffic, I spotted Suzuki Sensei standing at the bus stop there with a Japanese friend. I hollered "Okusan!" as I whizzed by. Okusan immediately turned to her friend and said "She's *very* sick!"

On the other hand, one day Suzuki Sensei asked me why we Americans get so upset about the Japanese practice of killing whales for commercial use when we practice such cruel methods of obtaining meat from cows and sheep. I said "Okusan, cows and sheep are very stupid, while whales are very intelligent." She shook her head and said "I don't understand why Americans think it's so important to be smart."

Suzuki Sensei told me one day that she was annoyed because a student at Page Street had opened the window in the kaisando behind the life-size carving of Suzuki Roshi and even though she had asked him to close it again, he had refused, saying the building needed fresh air. The next day she asked him to close it again, and he had refused again. Finally she said to him, looking very grieved, "When I passed by, I heard Suzuki Roshi coughing." Horrified, the student immediately closed the window. I said "Okusan, you don't play fair!"

One time our good friend Daya Goldschlag came to visit from Spokane, Washington and she and her teenage son, Kelly, and I and my teenage son, Ethan, and Suzuki Sensei all went to Zaoh for dinner. It was a wonderful reunion and we all sat there, eating and basking in the warm feelings we all had for each other. Suddenly Suzuki Sensei, without warning, burst into loud song. It was in Japanese and it had a very bright, happy rhythm to it. Well, it wasn't a short song. She went on for a few minutes and the song became more energetic and she began drumming the tabletop to accompany herself. When she finally finished, her face beaming, everyone in the restaurant applauded and stamped. The waiter brought us sake on the house.

Hekizan Tom Girardot

Mistake after mistake, Sensei says, "Tom-o-san, why do you want to study Tea?" Several years later she says, "Tom-o-san, Tea has entered your heart."

Ed Brown

Honoring Suzuki Sensei

Okusan is serving green tea
and pickled cabbage.
She heats the cups
with water from the elephant
thermos and brews the tea
in a small ceramic pot.
There is a small wooden saucer
for each tea cup.
Her kitchen isn't elegant
or stylish, yet each
thing seems to have its place
and belong where it is.
The pickles are crunchy, salty,
cool. Sometimes there are
rice crackers or even the
inquiry, "Would you like
some toast?"

She pours the tea, making one
cup at a time.
"Please go ahead," she says,
offering me the first cup.
I can't believe how precious
the cup feels in my hand
or the bouquet of the tea.
Earthy, aromatic, ocean-spray,
green vegetables.
In one taste of your tea, sensei
I know the depth of your
being...
your boundless bottomless heart,
and inside I feel the secret joy
and profound gratitude
of knowing that I belong here
in this world—
there's a place for me
at Okusan's table.

Gregory Wood

Plums

was it plums
that you mentioned to me
blossoming
in December
under the bridge
on a street corner
in Japantown
were they fooled
by an unexpected gift
blooming far too early
and unprepared for the shock
of Winter's cold
even as we laughed
imagining the trees as people
shocked and shivering in the cold
what amazement I felt for you
as if spring
had already arrived



Okusan with Abbots Mel Weitsman and Reb Anderson

Laurie Schley Senauke

I began studying tea with Okusan in 1981. I was very clumsy and awkward and my tea partner was a tall, graceful ballet dancer. In those days Okusan was a much stricter teacher, and she didn't hesitate to make fun of me during class. It was pretty hard. One day I was waiting in the hall for my class to start and I ran into the *ino* (person in charge of the meditation hall), whose office was in the same area. He began to criticize me, unfairly I felt, about my zendo attendance. We were still arguing loudly when Okusan opened the door to let me in. My face was red and I was on the verge of tears. Okusan didn't say anything, but after class she invited me in to her kitchen and made me a scrumptious bowl of noodles. I began to realize what a versatile, warm and kind person she really was.

In 1990 I was studying tea with Okusan and helping her on her weekly shopping trips to Japantown. I was also pregnant; she was a thoughtful advisor on how to talk to and care for my unborn child, cautioning me to avoid violent movies and television programs and to generate calm and joyful states of mind. She told me about her own pregnancy, about how awful her morning sickness was. To Okusan, the baby in my womb was already a full-fledged person and we joked about how she was her youngest tea student. Okusan also talks to plants, animals and rocks, illnesses and medicines, and she related that Suzuki Roshi had called his cancer, "My special friend."



Suzuki Roshi with Okusan

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Zen Center
300 Page Street
San Francisco, CA
94102

SCHEDULES:

SAN FRANCISCO

MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY

5:35-7:05 am zazen & service

5:40-6:30 pm zazen & service

SATURDAY

6:30-7:40 am zazen & service

7:40 am temple cleaning

7:55-8:25 am zendo breakfast

9:25-10:05 am zazen

10:15 am lecture

(8:45 am zazen instruction)

SUNDAY no schedule

GREEN GULCH FARM

SATURDAY THROUGH THURSDAY

5:00-7:00 am two zazens & service

5:15 pm zazen

FRIDAY

6:30 am zazen & service

SUNDAY

5:00-7:00 am two zazens & service

8:30 am zazen instruction

9:25 am zazen

10:15 am lecture

12:45 pm lunch

Daily schedule subject to seasonal change.

Call office to verify.

ONE DAY SITTINGS: once monthly; SEVEN DAY SETTINGS: twice yearly; THREE AND FIVE DAY SITTINGS: offered periodically. Each year there are residential practice periods of two -three months' duration at Green Gulch, City Center and Zen Mountain Center. For more information, please write to the City Center.

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