

TASHI CHOLING SANGHA NEWS JUNE 2021

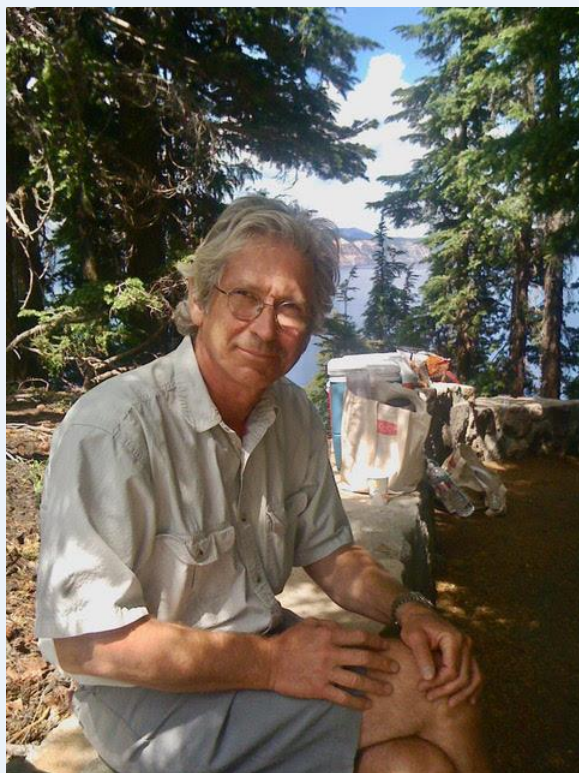


Photo by Lama Chonam

Sangha Spotlight: Nick Doherty

In 1969, Nick Doherty was living communally in the mountains outside of Boulder, Colorado. Hoping to heal a health condition that had developed, he began studying and using a macrobiotic diet, a Japanese method focused on using food as medicine. Over the years, he studied with some of the greats in that field, including Michio Kushi and Herman Aihara.

In 1970, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche arrived in Boulder and began teaching. In high school, Nick had developed an interest in Buddhism after reading a book by Alan Watts, but hearing Trungpa Rinpoche teach was what really hooked him. Trungpa Rinpoche's dharma talks and books have been a lasting influence. In 1971, while studying macrobiotics with Herman Aihara in San Francisco, Nick was able to hear Suzuki Roshi teach at the San Francisco Zen Center and received meditation instruction for the first time.

In January 1973, Nick traveled to New York City with a group of sangha friends to meet Dodrupchen Rinpoche, whom the group had invited to found a dharma center in Massachusetts. "We were waiting in a flat on the fourth floor of a building. The living room was like a museum's storage room, full of life-sized statues, thangkas, and rugs. We were sitting there waiting. Suddenly a young guy appeared. He was probably high, and freaked out.

He pulled a gun and put it to the back of one woman's head. 'What the hell is this place,' he sputtered. 'What is this, some kind of religious organization? Well, we're going to take up a collection!'" The thief ordered everyone to put their money in front of them and made one woman pick up it up. Then he grabbed the money and disappeared. Of course, everyone was quite shaken by the experience.

Fifteen minutes later, Dodrupchen Rinpoche appeared, accompanied by Lama Jigtse and Gyatrul Rinpoche. Disturbed by the robbery, some excitedly told the lamas what had just happened.

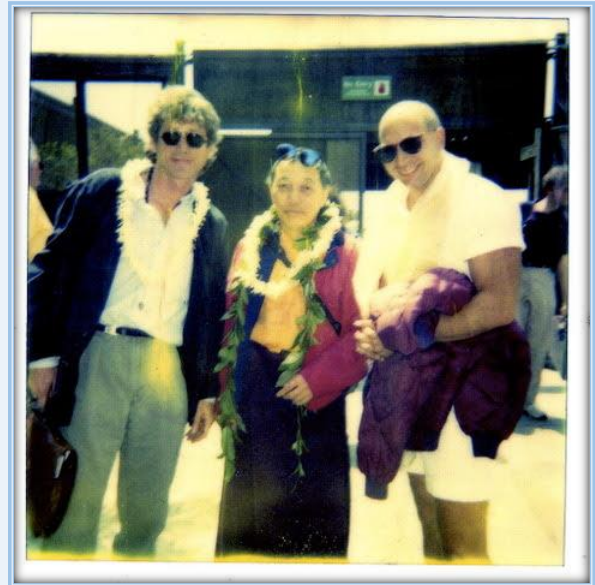
As Nick recalled, “Dodrupchen just sat there and listened. Then he said, ‘Okay, can we begin now?’ That is all he said.” That day, Dodrupchen Rinpoche offered a refuge ceremony and Nick was among those who took refuge.

The group rented a Victorian house in Northampton, Massachusetts to serve as Dodrupchen Rinpoche’s new dharma center, the Mahasiddha Nyingmapa center. Nick became the new center’s treasurer. For the next two years, he shared the house with a Tibetan man whose room was on the top floor. His housemate was Gyatrul Rinpoche, who had agreed to be the center’s resident lama. Lama Jigtse also resided there as Rinpoche’s attendant and helped teach the students Tibetan. Nick and Rinpoche spent a fair amount of time with each other, hiking, eating meals together, traveling, and engaging in the center’s activities. Rinpoche had some health issues from his time in India, but “he was his usual fierce and funny self,” Nick noted.

Of course, Rinpoche was not an ordinary housemate on any level. At one meal, Nick decided that his food needed more salt, and before he could say a word, Rinpoche handed him the salt shaker. Then there was Rinpoche’s agility and speed, qualities that have been noted by many of his students. Rinpoche was twenty-five years older than Nick, but on one hike to Mt. Holyoke, he easily ran past Nick and his friend on the way back down the side of the mountain off-trail.

“Of course, he laughed at us for that,” Nick recalled. Nick drove Rinpoche to Canada twice so that Rinpoche could visit Tibetan friends there. These two years of housemate adventures proved

to be a foundation for many years of closeness thereafter. “Having met when I was so young and inexperienced, our relationship has always felt familial, like a father-son relationship. From the moment we lived together in that house, I always felt connected to Rinpoche,” Nick reported.



In the early 90s, Nick Doherty, Gyatrul Rinpoche, and Sevyn Galambos in Hawaii

Nick’s interest in natural foods led him into the restaurant business. From 1972-1981, he was a partner in, then sole owner of, Beardsley’s Café Restaurant, a French natural foods restaurant in Northampton. The dharma center moved to a nearby town, and Nick became consumed as the sole owner of the restaurant, so he saw Rinpoche infrequently. After selling the restaurant, Nick moved to California, then lived in Amsterdam for three years, followed by a year in Paris. During that time, he began to trade currencies, which worked out well for him. Nick continued to stay in touch with Rinpoche via phone and mail, and on occasion visited Rinpoche at his Bay Area center.



In 1987, Rinpoche wanted to surround the Tashi Choling land with supportive neighbors and asked Nick to buy a nearby meadow, which Nick did. In 1993, Nick bought another parcel of land near Tashi Choling and moved into the house that had already been built there. Rinpoche placed him in positions of responsibility as a member of both the Pacific Region Yeshe Nyingpo board, which Nick still serves on, and the Tashi Choling board, on which he served for 15 years.

Nick has been a generous donor to Rinpoche and Tashi Choling over the years. He financed the cost of bringing electricity to the land and also financed legal costs during a land use dispute that stopped the center's development for several years. Nick found a respected land use attorney who successfully resolved the issue. When Nick gave Rinpoche a report about his meeting with the attorney, Rinpoche focused on the contention and animosity that had colored the long dispute. "I'm going to leave it up to you guys," Rinpoche told Nick. "But you should be compassionate

toward these people," he said, referring to those who had initiated legal proceedings against the center. "Don't let these people become your enemies. You should treat them like your mother," Rinpoche advised.

"He was trying to teach us that winning is not necessarily always the best thing or the most important thing," Nick said, recalling the conversation. Thanks to Rinpoche's harmonizing influence, the matter was settled in an amicable way, catalyzing friendly cooperation with the Colestin Fire District and other neighbors from then on.

Speaking of his relationship with Gyatrul Rinpoche, Nick said, "For the past fifty years, Rinpoche has been everything I could have hoped for in a spiritual teacher. No one has shaped me more. He is in the same category as my mother and father, but above it. There is no greater example for me in this world than Rinpoche. The personal relationship with the root lama is so important. He is why I am here in the Colestin Valley close to Tashi Choling. I have an inner sense of my good fortune and blessing to know him and to have spent time with him."

Nick has two children. His daughter, Lilla, is in her freshman year of high school. His son, Liam, is attending American University in Washington, DC, where he is studying Chinese, international relations, and economics.

It might be fun to end with a bit of sangha synchronicity. We have two Nicks in our Tashi Choling sangha: Nick Doherty and Nick O'Connor. The two Nicks met each other after an empowerment that Gyatrul Rinpoche gave in the Bay Area. As it turns out, both Nicks grew up in Highland Park, Illinois,

near Chicago, but never knew each other then. Both Nicks were born in the same year, three days apart. Both are Irish. Both have mothers that were born in Alabama. Both lived in the Bay Area and were in the restaurant business; both have been Gyatrul Rinpoche's devoted students for many years. In 1987, the year the two Nicks met, without knowing each other yet, Nick O. bought land on the east side of Tashi Choling and Nick D. bought property on the west side.

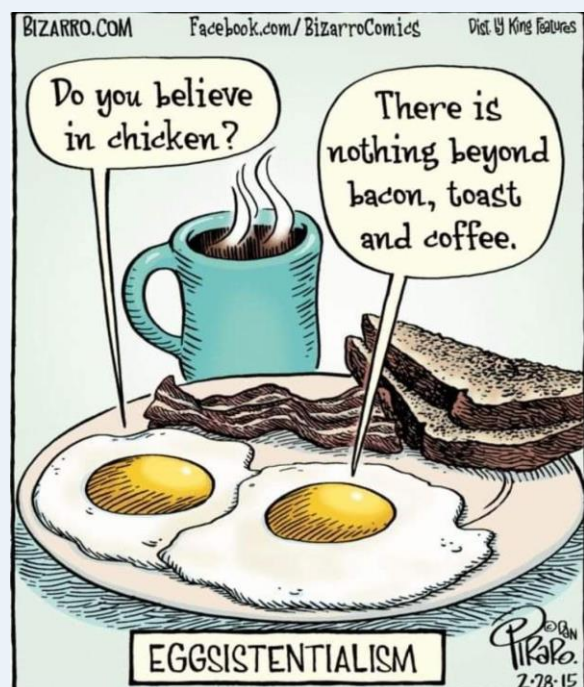
Rinpoche nicknamed Nick O'Connor Banana and gave Nick Doherty the nickname Zucchini. There are more serendipitous coincidences in their lives, and these details are only part of the story; but if you want more information you will have to ask one or both of the two Nicks directly.



About Sangha News

Sangha News appears bi-monthly. The next issue will be published in August. If you have any cartoons, poetry, news, book reviews, etc. you would like to share, please email Gaea Yudron at gaea.laughing@gmail.com

Cartoonish Contemplations



Thanks to Mark LaCoste for this eggsistential moment.

