

# Mt. Equity Zendo Zephyr- August 2011

## Finding A Zen Teacher in August of 1975

These days it's as easy as a click away to find a Zen teacher. Just point your browser to [szba.org](http://szba.org) or [americanzenteachers.org](http://americanzenteachers.org) and you have a list of American Zen teachers who are qualified and certified to teach Zen in both the Soto and Rinzai lineages. In *The Zuimonki* we read in ancient times earnest seekers walked the continent of China to find a teacher. Even in the 1970's finding a teacher was not easy. It's only within the last decade or so that Zen teachers have been so accessible.

How did the present American Zen teachers find their teachers? My teacher, Abbess Dai-En (NiOsho), told me the story of how she found her first Zen teacher, Omori Sogen Roshi, before there was such a thing as the internet. It was August of 1975 and she had been living in Tokyo about ten years....

Her first encounter with Zen began when she was 19. In her college bookstore, she found a book that had the intriguing letters Z-E-N in the title. The author was someone named D.T. Suzuki. After reading his book she said she felt two things simultaneously. The first was that she did not understand a thing she was reading. The second was that, somehow, she understood what she had read but she did not understand how she understood it.

Until she was introduced to Omori Roshi, all she had access to were the books of D.T.

Suzuki. "I'm embarrassed to admit it, but I read the few Zen books that were available for 17 years before I found a teacher," I often hear her say.

Transformation can not take place through reading a book about it or finding information online about it. It is through face-to-face contact with a teacher and Sangha that Zen is transmitted. Some people come to Mt. Equity Zendo saying that they've been meditating for a certain number of years alone. There are few people who can do this practice all by themselves without a teacher and not risk isolating themselves from their family, job, or larger community. From the beginning, Zen teaches that enlightenment manifests



through active engagement with real life situations and people. Practicing privately, by oneself, without regular contact with a teacher and community is reserved for the senior-most practitioners. Dogen Zenji has said, "If one cannot find a true teacher it's better not to practice at all."

As an English teacher in Japan in 1975, NiOsho taught children in Kyushu that summer. She learned that the husband of the host family left the house very early in the morning for zazen. She asked him, "Tomorrow is Sunday, my day off. May I come to learn how to do zazen with your group?"

The next morning NiOsho was sitting in the back of his pick-up truck going over a bumpy road and looking up at the brilliant stars in the southern night sky.

“The first time I sat zazen I passed out because I was trying too hard,” she said. This is not uncommon for beginners. She wanted to continue to practice and was given their teacher’s address in Tokyo.

As it turned out, upon her return, she realized that the temple was just three subway stops away on her line. She could just make it there for zazen if she could arrange her schedule so that she got up earlier.

“I had been used to studying for grad school in the quiet hours of the night, sometimes until dawn, but wondered what it would be like to see the sunrise upon waking up?”

For Zen practice to work, we have to arrange our life so that we can do the practice. Ordering our life, our relationships at home and work is no less a part of Zen practice than sitting on the cushion.

When I think of my teacher’s story I am inspired by how much effort it took for her to find her first Zen master. Once finding him, she was told that she was expected to come to the temple daily three years before koan study could be considered.

People find a teacher and come to practice in myriads of ways. This was my teacher’s way. There is one thing, however, that can not be over-looked and is common to all Zen practitioners in their search for a teacher: “When the student is ready, the teacher appears.”



*NiOsho is pictured (left) on the bus out of which her lineage teacher, Noda Daito Roshi, began his first Zen Dojo. When Oomori Roshi became too ill to teach, NiOsho went on a pilgrimage around 88 temples. While on that pilgrimage she met her root Zen teacher, Daito Roshi. While this bus no longer exists, it is from these humble beginnings that Daito Roshi created Kappa Dojo, a Zen temple dedicated to giving refuge to bullied children.*

## Scenes from July Silent Sesshin



Meigetsu (above) cools herself with a wrung-out towel while enjoying watching Sangha members play in the creek (left).

At Sesshin end, we enjoyed a picnic and swimming in the Little Muncy Creek at Picture Rocks.

On Saturday, July 16th Abbess Dai-En officially invited Nanshin to be our Lay “Head Seat” for the Summer Practice Period. As Head Seat she is expected to be an example of practice to others and will give the Dharma talk in August Sesshin followed by Dharma Combat Sunday morning, taking questions from students and replying from her deepest wisdom.

Saturday evening of August Sesshin we float Candles on the River for O-bon with our lanterns.

We extend a special thank you to members who were able to come early to help with the preparation for July Silent Sesshin including Tokuen, Jido, Annie Deighton, and Matt Green. We truly could not have done it without you.

Daishin will be away for a week of teaching and SZBA meetings, returning the day before August Sesshin. NiOsho will need help in his absence. Please email [NiOsho](mailto:NiOsho) if you can help her during that busy week. Here’s also a chance to make your lantern early with NiOsho.

<http://www.mtequity.org> [info@mtequity.org](mailto:info@mtequity.org)

## **Fuukan-san Receives Books from America**

We are happy to announce that the many children's books that have been sent to Fuukan's Temple in Japan have safely arrived. This was thanks to the efforts of many people connected with MEZ. Fuukan-san is pictured here hand delivering them to the Vice Principal of the nearby elementary school in Miyagi Prefecture.

She has informed us that the present needs in this hot and humid season are for simple T-shirts of all sizes for children and small sizes for adult men and women. In addition to this, folding umbrellas are also needed. As four months have passed since the disaster, women are starting to think of owning small personal items like lipstick. For those who have a sangha or group of like-minded people who would like to go together and make a purchase, sending a medium or large size "Priority Mail" box from the post office works well. Please contact Mt. Equity for the direct address in Japan of Fuukan-san's temple.



**Gratitude to the following people for making offerings of food and related items the month of July:** Nanshin, Tomei, Diane Hollis, Misho, Keien, Ginny Parkum, Brooke Wiley, Nanso Cleaver, Cathy Emery, Tokuen, Daijun, Jido, Eileen Georg and all others we may have inadvertently missed. Our heartfelt gratitude.

Thank you to Matt Green for taking paint and Kevin Gaughen for recycling plastic, items not easily recyclable in our area.

## **Teacher Travels**

Daishin will be leading a zazenkai at Red Rose Sangha in Lancaster, PA on August 13th, 10am - 3pm, continuing on to SZBA meetings in San Francisco the 14th - 17th.

NiOsho will be participating in ASZB meetings September 6th - 10th in Los Angeles.

# Special/Upcoming Events

**Zen and the Yummy Chocolate: Where did that little addiction come from?**

**Saturday, August 6th 1:30pm - 4:30pm**

**Vegetarianism and Reality: When the Tofu Hits the Fan**

**Sunday, August 7th 10am - 4pm**

**Women's Stayover - "Reclaiming Your True Self"**

**Saturday, August 13th, 1pm - Sunday August 14th, 11am**

**Weekend Sesshin - Candles on the River with Lay Head Seat Ceremony**

**August 19th - 21st**

**Slow Down and Take it Easy: Calming the Restless Mind**

**Saturday, September 3rd, 1:30 - 4:30pm**

**Under the Tree of Enlightenment: Zazen and Timber**

**Sunday, September 4th, 10am - 4pm**

**Weekend Sesshin - "Cooling Down"**

**September 16th - 18th**

Please Register One Week in  
Advance for Special Events:

[daishin@mtequity.org](mailto:daishin@mtequity.org)

or

(570) 546-2784

## **Weekly Practice Schedule**

**Tuesday Evening 7 - 9:15pm**

**Thursday Morning 6:30 - 8:00am** (includes Breakfast with oriyoki bowls - phone before coming)

**Thursday Evening 7 - 8:30pm**

*"[We] are not disturbed by things, but by the views which [we] take of things." -Epictetus*