

Tashi Choling

Sangha News

October 2020

Sangha Profile:

Ani Chonid/ Christy Sloan



Ani Chonid as a young child

Christy Sloan has memories of playing hide and seek in the tall grasses of nearby fields with her three siblings and friends. Life in the rural northern California towns of Guerneville and Sebastopol had an idyllic quality. But her parents divorced when Christy was 6 and everything changed dramatically. She and her siblings found themselves living in Berkeley with only one parent. It was a gigantic readjustment on many levels. Raising four boisterous children and

supporting them as a single mom was quite a job, yet Christy's mother managed to take her tribe camping several times a year. "I am sure it was not easy for her to take us all camping that way, but she did it," Christy recalled appreciatively. She and her mom continued to enjoy camping and backpacking together for many decades after. After the divorce, her mom also managed to earn a Ph.D. in paleontology and began to teach geology and environmental studies at UC Berkeley.

Although Christy's father lived nearby, he was not actively involved with the children's lives, seeing them somewhat occasionally on weekends. Christy's dad was an associate of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, renowned in the field of death and dying. He was also a student of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. One day when Christy was 16 or 17, her dad invited her to go with him to the Black Crown Ceremony, which was being given by the Sixteenth Karmapa in San Francisco. "There were thousands of people. The long horns, the chanting. I had no idea what was going on but I knew it was home," she noted. That day, the Karmapa offered Refuge, and Christy took it. After that event, however, many years passed before Christy found her root guru and connected with dharma more fully. "Over the years, there were experiences that felt like someone reaching to me through the veil," she said. Once she saw the Dalai Lama speak in a meadow at UC Santa Cruz and was awestruck by his presence. At the historic Chinese Joss House in Weaverville, she felt a deep connection with the Kwan Yin statue. It seemed to her that the statue was speaking to her, not in words, but by expressing a feeling.

To Christy, it seemed that Kwan Yin was saying, "Welcome home."

During a visit to Panther Meadow on Mt. Shasta, Christy met students of John Panama, who suggested she meet Barry Tellman, a teacher based in Santa Cruz, and later Marin County. This catalyzed a big shift. She divorced her husband, quit college, and became involved with Tellman's teachings for the next 18 years, until she was 42. "He was a father figure to me. I hadn't had a father. He was giving public talks on love, grace, and peace." But as time went on, Tellman changed in ways that were quite unsettling. Christy felt impelled to leave that community. Six others also left around the same time. Afterwards, they met weekly to support each other in healing from the experience.

Christy made a good friend during those years with Tellman's group, and that woman was instrumental in connecting Christy with her root teacher. Her friend, Mary, was deeply affected by reading Chatral Rinpoche's book, *Compassionate Action*. Later, Mary told Christy that Chatral Rinpoche's heart-son, Loppon Jigme Rinpoche, was living in Marin. "The cells in my body started dancing in bliss," said Christy, hearing about Loppon Jigme Rinpoche. Christy knew immediately that he was her root guru, without knowing his name or what he looked like.

(Editor's Note: Loppon Jigme Thutop Namgyal Rinpoche received the entire Dudjom Tersar cycle from Dudjom Rinpoche, and the entire Kama cycle, empowerment, oral transmission, and teachings from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. He received the entire Longchen Nyingtik cycle of

transmissions from Chatral Rinpoche, his root guru.)



Loppon Jigme Thutop Namgyal Rinpoche

In May 2007, Christy began attending the teachings that Loppon Jigme Rinpoche was giving weekly at a church in Marin. "I fell in love with him, but knew it was not a romantic love. He had a huge heart and was very gentle, loving, and caring." After receiving instructions on the Dudjom Tersar ngondro, she began to accumulate the foundational practices.

Meanwhile, Christy's father had moved to a home he built in the southern part of the Colectin Valley. Many years had passed with little contact between them, but Christy started to visit her father regularly at his rural home. During one visit, her father asked if he could call her each day to check in, as he was older and living alone. For the next two years, those daily calls brought them closer. Connecting on a video call one day, Christy was shocked to see how much her father had aged. She felt drawn to help him.



Ani Chonid and Pema. Photo by Ani Yeshe

In 2011, he moved to a house in Ashland. She moved in with him in 2012, providing companionship and care until his death in 2019. During those seven years, Christy and her father had many opportunities to review the past and to work on resolution and forgiveness with each other. "It was difficult for both of us, but beautiful and healing, too," she said.

Now living in Ashland, Christy began to attend pujas at Tashi Choling and became friends with Ani Yeshe. Sharing rides to and from the temple, the two women talked about dharma and ordination. "Being around the ordained at Tashi Choling, I noticed a quality I was attracted to," Christy said. "Mostly it was a feeling. Becoming ordained is not something you do lightly. It is a serious, beautiful, wonderful thing to do." Ani Yeshe lent Christy some books, and Christy contemplated ordination for some time. During a visit with her longtime

friend Mary, it became clear to Christy that she did indeed want to become ordained. She spoke with her guru Loppon Jigme Rinpoche about it; afterwards, she was ordained at the Palyul Retreat Center in upstate New York in 2017.

These days, Christy, who is now known as Ani Chonid, lives in Ashland with her little dog Pema. She continues to do bookkeeping work, as she has for the past 33 years. She helps organize Ashland activities offered by TLC Transitional Life Care, the nonprofit created by sangha member Julie Rogers to provide end of life support from a Vajrayana perspective. Her father was very open about discussing his upcoming death and preparing for it, as is her mother, who is still alive. Ani Chonid finds the TLC program, Deep Chat, a welcoming place, where participants can share about topics related to death and dying.

Outwardly, nothing much has changed since Ani Chonid's ordination. But inwardly, there have been changes. "Ordination has deepened my focus and faith in the Buddhist path. It has opened me to being more compassionate and to listening better." Complete strangers sometimes start conversations with her. Ani Chonid recalled how one day a young woman approached her in a market and asked her to pray for someone. "When they are talking with me as a nun, they are talking to something beyond me," she said. "I am very happy to be ordained. I feel it was the best decision in my life."



Tibetan calligraphy: IMPERMANENCE

Recent fires in southern Oregon have left thousands of people homeless. Though some Tashi Choling sangha members had to evacuate their homes for a few days, their homes remained safe. This tragedy, which occurred on September 8th, continues to resonate through the local community, reminding us all of the truth of impermanence and our fragility in the face of natural forces. Fortunately, there has been a wonderful outpouring of food, clothing, housing and other necessities for those who lost everything.

Om Mani Padme Hung

About Sangha News

Sangha News appears bi-monthly. The next issue will appear in December. If you have any news, poetry, cartoons, etc., please contact editor Gaea Yudron at gaea.laughing@gmail.com.

Cartoon Corner

