

Tashi Choling
Sangha News
February 2021

Sangha Profile:
Susan Bosworth



Susan Bosworth grew up on the East coast in the midst of her mother's large Italian family. Big family dinners occurred once or twice a week, often with 20 cousins running around. "We were very close. It was like being part of a village," she said.

Susan actually had two quite different families, one on each coast. "Both families were so rich in their own way," she commented. Her father's parents retired to a farm on the Applegate River, where they lived in a wonderful house built in 1859. To

Susan, month-long summer visits there were absolutely magical. Grandmother Marie Bosworth, a mover and shaker, promoted organic gardening, was active in progressive politics, and was a member of the United Nations Association, hosting international guests at the farm. She was a significant influence in Susan's life, introducing her granddaughter to both intellectual inquiry and moral accountability. Susan had her first experience of meditation with her. One day, as they sat by the irrigation canal near the river, where water flowed very slowly and smoothly, her grandmother suggested, "Just let your mind merge with the water in the canal."

At 15, Susan was in a bad car accident. A year later, she found in records that she had been pronounced dead on arrival, though that turned out to be a fleeting condition. She remembers an out of body experience, looking down at the scene from high above. During the long recovery from her injuries, she missed a year of high school. She spent 2-½ months in traction in the hospital and underwent bone graft surgery. While recovering, she enjoyed creating art. Susan had always been a creative, artistic person.

After high school, she attended UMass in Boston, then UMass at Amherst, then the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. Gyatrul Rinpoche's Bay Area center (Orgyen Dorje Den) was not far from the college. Susan remembers seeing figures in maroon robes at a café near the college, but that was the extent of her connection at that time. Susan's beloved grandmother, who really was her anchor, died suddenly when Susan was 19, and the next two years were difficult. She moved out to the farm to live with her grandfather, then moved to Ashland. Pregnant with her first child, she

began searching for a meaningful spiritual path. In 1984, Susan met Gyatrul Rinpoche at the site of the Vajrasattva statue in the Colestin Valley, which was almost complete. “I was simultaneously attracted to and terrified of Rinpoche,” she recalled. “Once I started to go to teachings, though, I was hooked. I could feel something and couldn’t describe it. The teachings provoked profound intellectual inquiry. Impermanence, looking at life honestly, these were truths that were not about blind faith. It’s as if Gyatrul Rinpoche picked up where my grandma left off.”

In 1985, Susan moved to Florida for 18 months, working as a substitute teacher. Susan had been interested in death for many years. Perhaps her earlier near-death experience had something to do with it. In Florida, she spent several months taking hospice training that included writing personal essays about dying. During her Florida sojourn, Susan met Mukara Meredith, who invited her to run workshops with her. Mukara brought Tsultrim Allione from Italy, and Susan took part in a seven-day womens’ workshop that included a tsok offering, awareness of the body, and mantra recitation.

Susan married and had a daughter, but when the marriage later ended, she realized she had to figure out a more secure way to support herself and her two children. Her path led her to complete an undergraduate degree at SOU, with plans to become a high school teacher. In 1993, on Christmas day, she met Lama Bruce Newman at the Mouse House (across from Tashi Choling’s Vajrasattva statue in the Colestin Valley) and shared a holiday dinner with Kay Henry, Chris McKinnies, and Bruce. After that, Susan

began to study with Bruce, and for the next two years, she helped organize and publicize



Bruce, Susan, and Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche

his classes. Eventually, they began a romantic relationship and were married in 1998 by Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, Bruce’s root guru, at Rinpoche’s center in Leggett, California.

With Bruce’s encouragement, Susan began a course of study at Naropa University in Colorado. She earned an MA in Gerontology and Long-Term Care Management in 2001. Returning to Ashland, she worked at Mountain Meadows retirement community for 18 months and then started her own practice, Geriatric Care Management. Liz Hoskinson has been her colleague in that work for many years. Susan has taken other trainings related to aging, creativity, and dying. These include Wisdom and Compassion in Aging in 2004; Death Walker Training in 2018; Soul Collage Facilitator Training in 2017; and Voice Dialogue Facilitator Training in 2017. She is a participating member of Transitional Life Care, Ashland.

“For many years, my experience as a private geriatric care manager was like standing in the rapids. The work kept coming and coming: the clients, the families, the

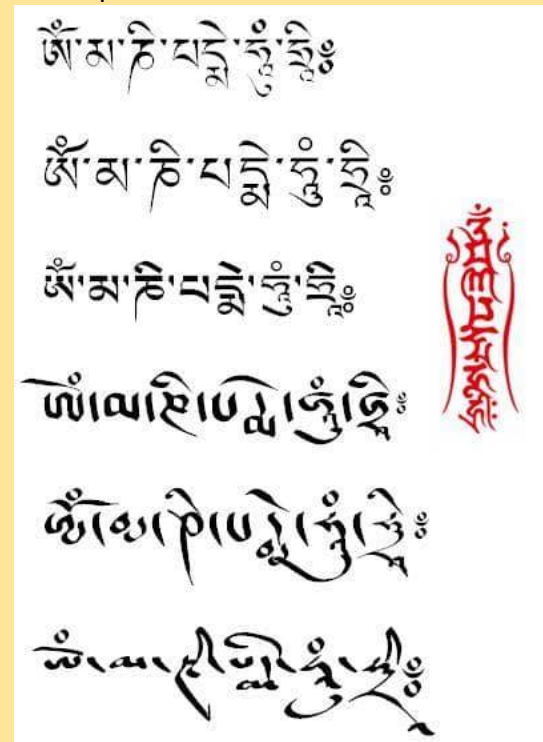
personal connections, illness, and death. Many of my clients were under my care for over 10 years. I often came into their lives when they were no longer able to live independently, no longer able to manage their homes, their bills, or their bodies. Over the past 20 years, I have been responsible for the conditions surrounding my clients as they have died. I have done my best to support a peaceful environment with loving family, friends, or hired caregivers to tend to them as they died."

After the stress of being on call 24/7 for two decades, Susan is ready to slow down and shift gears. She cares for fewer clients and plans to write a book about how to orchestrate a good plan for one's later years and end of life. In her experience, few people take the time to organize and prepare. "There's a cost, the amount of energy it takes to keep aging and end of life issues at bay. We owe it to ourselves and our community to create a blueprint that works. That involves educating ourselves, which is empowering," she said.

Although most of her clients had sufficient capital to finance their last years, just a small percentage of them were really prepared, according to Susan. "It can cost \$220,000 a year for care. But it's bigger than the money. It's facing death, the only thing we can be certain about, which most people want to avoid. It's having the courage and curiosity to learn about the nuts and bolts of what is available to you in terms of care, how the systems work, who pays for what." Susan plans to cover this and related areas in her upcoming book.

"As Buddhists, we are fortunate to have spiritual instruction and preparation; but if you want to have your aging and dying

experience protected, you have to take care of the practical details and not leave things



Om Mani Padme Hung in various scripts

up to your family or friends. I can assure you that, in most cases, your friends, relatives, or even strangers will be eternally grateful if you tell them what you want and what you need to feel comfortable and supported as you prepare to die."

Susan's two children are grown and both are doing well. Her son Nate lives in Portland and works as a computer tech. Her daughter Naomi, her partner Paul, and their child, 3 year-old Quinn, live nearby in southern Oregon. Best wishes to Susan for completion of her book, which will benefit many people.

About Sangha News

Sangha News is published bi-monthly. The next issue will appear in April. If you have any poems, cartoons, essays, or news, please send to gaea.laughing@gmail.com By March 15th.



HAPPY LOSAR!
FEBRUARY 12th
Best wishes for a healthy and
spiritually fulfilling new year

Cartoon Contemplations

