

## **Tashi Choling Sangha News February 2019**



### **Sangha Spotlight: Samantha Cheney**



Raised in the Napa Valley, Samantha was very athletic throughout her school career, playing soccer, volleyball, and softball. She did track, swam, and skied, too. Samantha completed three years of college at the

University of California in Chico and dropped out when she was bit by a travel bug. Fortunately, her older sister felt a strong urge to take a break from workaday life at the same time. So the two of them headed south in a trusty orange VW van and spent six months traveling in Mexico. "We had the time of our lives. What a gift it was to spend that time with her," Samantha said. She was 22 at the time.

In the years that followed, Samantha managed restaurants, worked in the wine industry, and held jobs as a nanny and waitress. She lived in Utah, Florida, Toronto, New Jersey, and California. At one point, she had a job that involved chasing hot air balloons in order to help them land. While at work one day chasing a hot air balloon, she suffered a severe back injury that incapacitated her for years. "It was a scary time. I couldn't stand or sit. Of course, I couldn't work. I was living with my Mom," she recalled.

During that difficult time, Samantha kept hoping to find a healer who could help her. One day, a ferryboat captain in Marin gave her the phone number of Les Collins. She made an appointment to see Les. It was a fortunate connection. "Les is an intuitive, authentic healer who really helped me heal, and he also introduced me to Rinpoche, who is the real doctor," she said.

While going to Les for healing treatments, Samantha began to attend his meditation classes in Marin. Sometimes her sister and her father also participated. Then, Les

suggested that Samantha meet Gyatrul Rinpoche. So one day she attended a teaching that Rinpoche was giving at Orgyen Dorje Den. "Even when he was talking in Tibetan and I couldn't understand what he was saying, I knew he was telling the truth," she said. "My life changed dramatically at that moment." Soon, she took refuge with Rinpoche and began to attend teachings at Orgyen Dorje Den. "I've always known that he has me tucked under his wing. I know that I can trust him. He stole my heart. He knows I am a screwed up samsaric being and he still loves me."

About two years later, Samantha uprooted her life in California and moved to southern Oregon to be closer to Rinpoche and Tashi Choling. Almost immediately, she started studying with Ila Reitz and Shashi Reitz in order to learn how to be a chopon, the one who carries out ritual activities during pujas and empowerments.

"Scary, trying to do something in a foreign language, like jumping into the abyss," Samantha said, sharing her impressions from that time. Because of the language barrier, she found that she was using her intuition and body language cues from the lama as guides during her chopening. Even so, mistakes happened. "It's a stretch. You screw up and have to learn to be okay with mistakes. It's a great way to learn the sadhanas," she said. "And I loved learning with Ila and Shashi. I am so blessed with chopening, which gives me blocks of time to be immersed in the dharma. And I'm

grateful, because it's something I can continue to offer to the center."



Soon after her arrival, Nick O'Connor offered Samantha the staff position of facilities manager, which she accepted. Kay Henry gave her a transmission on the water system, which Kay had valiantly cared for over many years. Samantha's job as facilities manager includes the water system and much more. "When something breaks, I have to figure out how to fix it," she said, summarizing her responsibilities, which keep her busy. For the past four years, Samantha has lived at the guest cottage, more commonly known as the Mouse House, with her partner (and soon to be husband) David Gelfand.

In addition to her activities at the center, Samantha has worked for 12 years in the office of Dr. Elyse Herrick, a naturopathic physician and acupuncturist in Ashland.

“She has been a huge mentor for me. Sure, I run her front office, but I’ve learned so much in the process. I’ve always been interested in healing and in helping people heal. Really, she is part of my family. She has treated Rinpoche and many visiting lamas as an offering and continues to support Rinpoche with medicines. She donated many medicines to go inside the Vimalamitra statue, too.”

About 7 years ago, Samantha contracted Graves’ Disease, an autoimmune condition “You look fine on the outside, but on the inside it’s challenging,” she said. Dr. Herrick and Tibetan doctor Dickey Nyerongsha have both been very helpful as Samantha continues to seek ways to maintain her health and to contribute to Tashi Choling.

Since 2009, Samantha has been a member of the Tashi Choling board of directors. “Of course the board has fiscal responsibility and has to make sure liability issues are taken care of. And the board has to support Tashi Choling’s mission statement, and its vision for the future. What motivates me is to bring our sangha family together, to benefit and take care of Tashi Choling the best I can. All human beings are trying to get liberated. It’s important to find commonality, and for sangha members to know that they are part of a whole and find a way to take part,” she said.

If you haven’t had a chance to get acquainted with Samantha yet, I hope you do get an opportunity someday soon. In my experience,

she is an open-hearted, smart, dedicated woman with a funny sense of humor, the kind of person you can rely on in a tough situation, when it’s time to have some fun, do some serious practice, or for the long run. We are fortunate that she is here in the midst of the variegated splendors of our mandala.

**Congratulations, Samantha, on your recent engagement to David Gelfand.**

## **A Blast from the Past**

**This showed up on Facebook a few weeks ago, and I checked in with Ani Baba about sharing it. This is when she was Barbara Brown, working at Geppetto’s, playing the cello....**



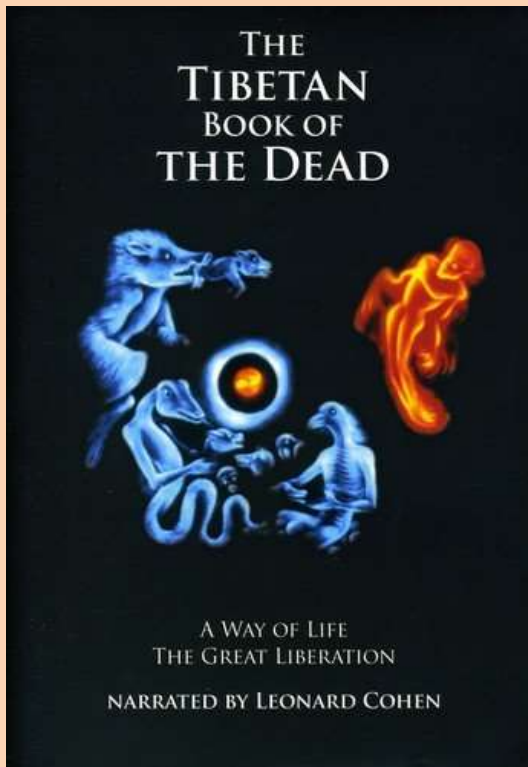
*In 1984, before she became our dear Ani Baba, Barbara Brown (right) played the cello for a performance of 'Child's Christmas in Wales'*

## Teachings of the Masters Film Series

Join us on Sunday, February 10<sup>th</sup> at 5pm in the Gresham Room of the Ashland Library for the first film in a series. We will be showing "The Tibetan Book of the Dead," narrated by Leonard Cohen.

The film series is a program of TLC Transitional Life Care, a Vajrayana Buddhist nonprofit offering training and support for the end of life transition. Julie Rogers is its founder and director.

Films will be offered monthly. There is no charge and popcorn will be served.



## From the Editor: A Book About the Life and Wisdom Activities of Gyatrul Rinpoche



*Photo by Iridea Beamonte*

For the past several years, I've been working on a book about the life and wisdom activities of Gyatrul Rinpoche. In the process, I've interviewed more than 100 people. The book is progressing well.

I am still seeking teaching stories--anecdotes about Gyatrul Rinpoche. Perhaps you have one or more to share. Your story could be something that Rinpoche said or did that influenced your life, perspective, or practice. It could be a story told to you by another sangha member, or something that occurred to you directly. These kinds of stories illustrate Rinpoche's varied teaching methods and display how he relates to disciples and friends.

Your story may be short, mundane, mystical, ridiculously funny, dreamlike, provocative, or somewhat embarrassing. Many of the stories I've collected thus far fit into one or more of these descriptions.



Thank you to all who have already shared stories for consideration in the book.

If you would like to share a story, but want to remain anonymous, that is also fine. Please get in touch with me at [gaea.laughing@gmail.com](mailto:gaea.laughing@gmail.com) and we can go on from there.

## Notes from the Board

Happy New Year to one and all! In future editions of the Sangha News, the board will use this space to update the sangha on various board-related activities on behalf of Tashi Choling. Also, we want to encourage you all to feel free to send questions, thoughts, and ideas to the board at [tashicholingconnection@gmail.com](mailto:tashicholingconnection@gmail.com). In addition, Lisbeth and Sam would like to personally invite you to contact either of them directly if you would like to talk one-on-one about whatever is on your mind. They would like the sangha to know that their doors are always open and they're always happy to meet with you by phone or in person. In this New Year, we wish to invite all sangha to join with us in the ongoing effort to build a strong spiritual community at Tashi Choling, to nurture and support one another in our lives and practice, and to continue to find ways to come together as one dharma family.



Happy Year of the Earth Pig!

## About Sangha News

Sangha News appears bi-monthly and is sent out by email with the Tashi Choling bulletin.

You can read past issues by accessing links on the home page of our website, [www.tashicholing.org](http://www.tashicholing.org). Don't miss out on all the previous sangha profiles!

Matthew Small, Ani Yeshe, Philip Thomas, Doug Col, Lisbeth LaCoste, Ani Rioh, Fred Ehmke, and more.... it's a great way to get to know sangha members a little better.

The next issue will appear in April.

Send your article suggestions, cartoons, etc. to editor Gaea Yudron [gaea.laughing@gmail.com](mailto:gaea.laughing@gmail.com) by March 15<sup>th</sup>.

## Be Here Now

