

Tashi Choling Sangha News October 2021



Sangha Spotlight: Elaine Mellon

Born in Bangor, Maine, Elaine Mellon spent her childhood in Maine, upstate New York, and Pennsylvania. Elaine had a loving, hard-working dad and a warm, outgoing mother who was active in PTA and other civic groups. Elaine's parents divorced when she was 12 and her mother opened her own business—a pizza shop. With her mom busy working at the shop for many hours, Elaine, who was the oldest of four children, often cared for her siblings.

Elaine's mom sometimes brought youngsters home from the nearby mental hospital to spend the weekend. Wayward

kids, homeless people, stray animals, and others found a safe haven in their family home. At times, Elaine's mom gathered her kids and assorted visitors for visits to museums, skiing trips, and other enjoyable outings. "My mother had a lot of love to give and she had a beautiful, bright spirit. She saw the beauty in every person, no matter how they presented," Elaine said. Of that time in her life, she noted, "It was a mixed bag, both scary and beautiful."

Growing up, Elaine liked to read about people who focused on making the world a better place. She enjoyed caring for stray animals and she was inspired by spending time in nature. In high school, a class in English composition opened a pathway into her future. The teacher, Miss Purdy, encouraged students to hone their writing ability with essays and journal entries. Recognizing Elaine's writing skill, Miss Purdy encouraged her. "She made you feel that you were worth something," Elaine said, recalling the teacher's positive impact on her life.

Elaine earned a BA in communications and media at Chatham College in Pittsburgh. She had exciting plans for post-college life. She would begin making documentaries, films to galvanize positive social change. Soon after graduating, she moved to New York City and began working with a group of independent filmmakers. It felt wonderful to develop documentaries with others who had a similar vision.

During her senior year in college, Elaine had created a documentary about midwives. Midwives fascinated her. She found their skills and gentle, traditional ways of assisting at births very moving. In the midst of her new film career, her

interest in midwives continued. One evening she attended a talk by French physician Michel Odent MD, who was speaking about natural water birth. Jennifer Dorhn, a certified nurse midwife, provided an introduction to the doctor and the topic. In the process, she mentioned a new birthing center dedicated to serving a low-income population in the Bronx. Soon Elaine found her way to the birthing center, where she began to observe births. "I saw women who were all alone and very scared. The center provided so much support for them. When I saw my first baby being born, it was the sweetest experience, so gentle and safe." Elaine was hooked.

Of course, she was also conflicted. "I just graduated," she told herself. "And now what? Am I going in a whole other direction?" As it turned out, she was. Leaving Manhattan, she traveled to El Paso, Texas to take a 6-month midwifery training at Maternidad La Luz, which had just opened. Maternidad served mainly Spanish-speaking women from both Texas and Mexico. It is still operating and is one of the most affordable places for women who come across the border to El Paso to give birth. During her training, Elaine assisted at 75 births.

The services of direct entry home birth midwives were legal in only 13 states at that time. A friend at Maternidad told Elaine that Oregon was a place where she could practice legally. So, Elaine headed for Oregon in 1989. As it turned out, her mother, sister, and two brothers all decided to move West to southern Oregon the same year.

For the next 10 years, Elaine delivered 130 babies in the Applegate, Greensprings, and other nearby areas,

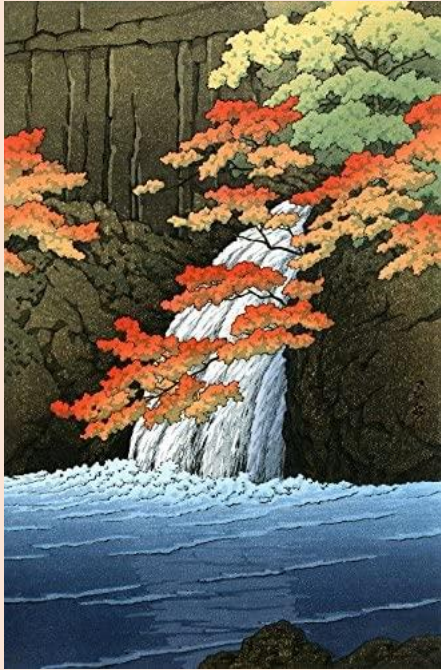


often to women living in cabins on dirt roads with no electricity. She attended the births of quite a few babies that appeared in the Tashi Choling sangha, including Rinchen Thomas, Liam and Lila Doherty, Mariposa and Che Tratensek-Contor, Emma Belle Mudra, Chokyi Carstens, and Sage, Jade, and Chloe Boucher.

Elaine met Richard Schwindt in 1994. She was heading to Bali, where she had been invited to teach midwifery. She invited Richard to accompany her. On their way, they stopped at Half Moon Bay and Elaine met Gyatrul Rinpoche for the first time.

Returning to Oregon, Elaine had a series of vivid dreams that featured Rinpoche's

feet. One day at Tashi Choling, Elaine told Sangye Khandro about these dreams. In response, Sangye suggested that Elaine go upstairs and massage Rinpoche's feet. Although she felt shy and reluctant, Elaine made her way upstairs. "Rinpoche was looking at his shrine. We had a conversation, and I massaged his feet. It felt like we were old friends," she said.



Elaine mused about how wonderful it was to have had those dreams of Rinpoche's feet. "And then, there I was, massaging them."

Over the next few years, Elaine had other dreams about Rinpoche. She noticed that some elements in her dreams actually took place later. In one dream, Rinpoche gave her a gift. Then, in waking life, he actually gave her that gift.

It was the coup de grace, in terms of her understanding. "Finally, I had a spark of recognition about how expansive, magical, and sublime Rinpoche's mind is.

It shook me to my foundation. It felt like a faith-bomb went off."

Elaine and Richard Schwindt married in 2001 and had many adventures together. Their relationship continues to be close and harmonious, although they now live separately. "We are dharma companions forever," Elaine said. "We are caring, respectful, and loving with each other."

Currently, continuing her life-long habit of caring for others, Elaine is training to become a certified drug and alcohol counselor to help make a positive difference in peoples' lives.

When asked if she had any final comments, Elaine shared a recent dream. In it, the sangha and Rinpoche were all together again in person. It was a festive occasion, with some folks wearing glitter. Elaine, like many of us, is looking forward to being with the sangha in person again, after our long Zoomish interlude.

Cartoon Moment



About Sangha News

Sangha News is published bi-monthly. The next issue will appear in December.

Please contact Gaea Yudron at gaea.laughing@gmail.com with any poetry, cartoons, photos, or article ideas.

Sangye Khandro visited Rinpoche recently in Half Moon Bay



Rinpoche wrote this beautiful prayer during the time that the Tashi Choling temple was being constructed:

To call myself a Bodhisattva, I must never abuse or disrespect even an ant.

The supreme, absolute Bodhicitta prevails as the very nature of all that lives.

Just as the essence of milk is butter, the essence of Mahayana is Bodhicitta.

Just as the essence of a flower is honey, the essence of Mahayana is Bodhicitta.

If Bodhicitta deteriorates, like a precious vessel that breaks, there is a chance it may still be restored.

Even though all physical qualities may be complete, if there exists no cause for liberation, difficulties will still arise.

Even if all other qualities are fully endowed, without Bodhicitta there can be no true good fortune.

Whatever occurs, whoever one meets, the Bodhicitta must never be abandoned.

If one loses the supreme Bodhicitta, there is no chance to realize Buddha.



Gyatrul Rinpoche in Ensenada, 1983