

Victoria

In 1974 a few months after Lama Tashi Namgyal moved to Victoria and began holding nightly puja in a rented house, Kendo was asked to conduct zazen one night per week in the living-bed-puja room. We began sitting for two hours on Thursday nights—three or four of us until, in the spring of 1975, Roshi delivered a public lecture at the University of Victoria. This event induced a rush of zazen Thursdays for a few months. People were sitting on their coats and kinhin was shoulder to shoulder. However the flash flood soon trickled off. We experimented with changes in days and times and continued our weekly sittings at the Victoria Dharma Centre. The lama frequently joined us.

One day David Ptolemy, a former Mt. Baldy monk who had moved to Victoria, returned from a sesshin with a mission. He wanted to found a zen centre —"for Roshi" as he put it. With no place to call our own and with lackluster zazen attendance some of us were skeptical that an organization would mean anything more than paper work and headaches. But David was insistent and the Victoria Zen Centre Society held its first meeting in December, 1980. Shortly thereafter, David Ptolemy de-monked himself and hasn't been heard from since, and we still sit one night per week at the Dharma Centre. However the legacy is still very much alive: membership is stronger now and so is the number of committed students.

Victoria Zen Centre

In 1985 we held our first weekend retreat in the forest at Kendo Ric Hunter's house. We sat on a raised outdoor platform and slept in a tent. During work periods we constructed a ten minute kinhin train looping down to the forest bottom and back up through a rockfall. Eshin John Godfrey, Abbot of the Vancouver Zen Centre, frequently joined us on these weekend. His presence has sustained and intensified our membership and practice. Eshin now joins us twice monthly (on Monday nights) when he delivers a twenty minute talk during the middle of three sitting periods and answers questions over tea after the closing chant. He has also led two summer five-day retreats, the most recent of which was held on Galiano Island between Vancouver and Victoria.

In 1991 various members began holding Sunday morning zazen periods as part of a pan-Buddhist program at the interdenominational chapel of the University of Victoria. Other members also assist in these introductory periods.

—Kendo

