

RING OF BONE ZENDO

FALL 2020

WWW.RINGOFBONEZENDO.ORG

P.O. BOX 1525 NEVADA CITY, CA 95959

WHAT'S CALLED FOR?

~ by Pat Ferris

Over the years, I've progressively understood forks in the road or personal and collective dilemmas less as moments to decide direction than as invitations to discern the potential or optimal way ahead. Such discernment each time requires developing anew a broad and specific understanding of the needs, demands and requirements of the given situation, coupled with a renewed, perhaps deeper and broader understanding of my own unique gifts, unrealized aptitudes and potential offerings. The periods of major transition have been for me inflection points in which calls emerge, to the extent that I can listen and explore with open inquiry and embrace of uncertainty. And to the extent that I can respond and follow those calls, a new chapter can unfold, a new or renewed relationship can emerge more suited to the needs of the moment. The call can be met with a uniquely appropriate response.

The questions that propel me are: "What's called for now?" And "What can I best offer?" And "What response is most appropriate to these circumstances?"

My greatest interest in this current life chapter has been to find leverage in addressing six interconnected crises: the climate emergency, environmental injustice, historic systemic racism, threats to the foundations of democracy, biodiversity and habitat loss, and the current global health crisis. Since the intensity of the crises is so immense and the stakes are so high, my biggest question has been and is "What does this time of crises call for?" This is a question that I've put to myself intensely and, by way of this article, am putting to you, imagining that it's a burning question that you're likely also asking yourself.

As a result of my more recent inquiry, I've felt called to an unexpected new chapter of engaged civic activism. This current life chapter calls for a deepened and broadened "spiritual" practice appropriate to circumstances, bringing

practice, realization, and embodiment off the cushion, into and beyond the marketplace and into the common realm at all levels.

From one vantage point this life chapter is not essentially different from but instead crystallizes and clarifies concerns that have been central for me for decades.



Photo by Jill Marie Fuerst

In my late teens and early twenties, during the Civil Rights/Black Power and Vietnam eras, I filed with my draft board as a conscientious objector, served as a draft counselor, helped in a small way to organize demonstrations, and wrote my senior thesis on Nonviolence as a Way of Life. At graduation, I chose to sit alone in the audience rather than wear cap-and-gown and walk across the

HELLO ROBZ SANGHA, AUTUMN 2020

~ by Jill Marie Fuerst

Many of you, I do not know.

I arrived at ROBZ Monday night Zazen on November 26, 1984. I returned for the Great Cold sesshin in February 1985. I moved to Nevada County for my first Mountains & Rivers, summer, 1985.

I am gifting two books to ROBZ that I have compiled from my photographs and ROBZ newsletter articles, 1985-1994. *Dewdrops and Roundabouts* reflects Zendo activities. *Mountains & Rivers* represents backpacking sesshin trips.

In 2014, I took apart my ROBZ photo albums. I sent photos back to individuals. I kept a collection to accompany the newsletter articles. I put together two scrapbook binders. In 2015, I realized these "scrapbooks," like in any family, would be slowly taken apart and that book form would be better.

January 2020, I learned the software of an online publishing company to complete book project #1 about my sister Penny.

February 2020, pandemic hints were surfacing as I worked on #2 *Dewdrops and Roundabouts*. I completed #3, *Mountains & Rivers*, on Sunday, March 15, 2020.

I didn't know if the publishing company had closed, would close, and/or recover. I sent the only copies of book project #1 to my grandniece. Project #2 and #3 went to Gary Snyder for an early 90th birthday celebration gift. It was a wild ride; mistakes, corrections, imperfections and amazing successes and connections.

Still Alive

At the end of the journey!

An evening in late Autumn

Basho

To me, photography is storytelling. I thank those who got used to me, who let

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stage with my classmates. I was painfully aware as a privileged white male that black and brown young men were underrepresented in colleges like mine and overrepresented among the dead in Vietnam in my place. I didn't want to distinguish myself further from them by taking on the trappings of privilege and social hierarchy.

In a personal act of civil disobedience I refused to pay the telephone tax instituted solely to fund the Vietnam War. When my unpaid tax accumulated to \$24.14, the IRS impounded my car. Rather than contact news media, as I would do now, I paid the tax plus penalties and towing charges, licked my wounds and ended my activism.

I was politically engaged early on. But I was also deeply alienated, painfully shy, very lonely, often in despair and in blind rather than informed grieving. My father disowned me during this period due to my political views and life choices, telling me not to come home and not to consider myself his son. I felt like I was without a home, without a family and, it felt, without a country.

Losing all faith in "the American experiment", I searched more broadly for home. Becoming drawn to a UNESCO-supported alternative utopian community in India, I sold my few belongings, and flew to India. Having been told that I could enter with a 3-week visa and then change it to a residence visa, my assumption was that I would live there for the rest of my life, contributing to building a model city and a model society. Instead, between the time I bought my ticket and the time I landed in India, the US had backed Pakistan in a new India-Pakistan war, and the Indian government eliminated the policy of Americans exchanging 3-week visas for residence visas. So instead of living in India for the rest of my life, I stayed three weeks and returned to America to re-build a life. I was forced to find a way in this country.

Searching for signposts, wayfinders and mentors, I attended many lectures in college and read as widely as I could. Gary Snyder came to our campus, spoke twice, and in 1970, I read a piece of his entitled *Four Changes*. As Gary later wrote in *Turtle Island*, the piece was "in response to an evident need for a few practical and visionary suggestions." I definitely had such a need, and, I felt, *Four Changes* pointed the way.

MEETING FOR BUSINESS & PRACTICE NEWS

Ring of Bone Zendo has lost its Fire Insurance and Liability coverage because we are such small customers. We are considering self-insuring for fire and are researching options for the liability.

~ Reed Hamilton

Certainly Gary's analysis of our collective ecological/political/cultural crisis rang true at a depth and as a connected whole I had not experienced elsewhere. And in pointing out specific actions we could take collectively and individually in relation to core juggernauts (population, pollution, consumption), Gary kindled the fires with urgency and a sense that we could co-create the needed transformation. Indeed each time I read the piece, with each sentence I felt a call and a clarity and direction—until I came to the last line:

Knowing that nothing need be done, is where we begin to move from.

Questions arose:

"What does that mean?"

"What are our actions and movements in that light?"

"What is the mind that knows such a thing?"

"Is there a path to such a knowing?"

That line entered me and has resided now for over 50 years. The drive to penetrate that line was a major propellant for me to move with my young family to Nevada County, where in November of 1981, I found myself on a dark, blustery, pouring-down-rain night with Tony Mociun and Gary, in a drafty, cold barn, sitting zazen for only the second time in my life, while a mouse (or rat) scurried from the corner to the altar and back again.

Over the ensuing years I had the great good fortune to sit, walk, laugh and cry first with Gary, then with Robert Aitken, then with Nelson Foster and with fellow practitioners who became dear. The way opened for me, and on several occasions I got a taste of "nothing need be done."

I intentionally brought my deepest questions to practice. On a Mountains & Rivers sesshin in Nevada, I told everyone at the start that outwardly it would appear that we would be walking

together for seven days. But they would be walking through High Rock Canyon, while because of very troubled family and work circumstances, I would be walking through the Land of Misery. I felt I was in a box canyon in my life, the only way out being to turn around, but I knew that going back wouldn't resolve the dilemma. So I brought that to the walking, to the times with Nelson one-on-one. During one of those times, the floor dropped out, the walls vanished, the top disappeared, and either Nelson or I or both said, "There's nowhere to abide. And there's no base to rely on." And there wasn't. And there isn't.

Knowing that nothing need be done, is where we begin to move from.

Nothing need be done, and—no contradiction—I realized anew that a helluva lot needs to be done. During the troubling times especially of the Reagan and Bush presidencies, I became aware of the growing wealth inequities, the environmental and climate degradation, the increased militarism, the basic undermining of the social safety net for those who need it the most. I attended two protests in San Francisco during that period (one related to the Gulf War, one related to the War in Iraq), but otherwise I took my deepening social concerns into my formal practice and channeled them into my work. I didn't see that what needed to be done could be done more directly by me.

On the morning of November 10, 2016, I awakened with shock to realize that the people of the Disunited States of America had elected Donald Trump to be President. Compelling questions arose: How could Americans elect a person so eminently unsuited; a man whom I knew to be racist, misogynist, xenophobic, elitist, and completely self-referential, who so readily embodies and disseminates greed, hatred and delusion? What did his election imply about America? What did it imply about our time? What did his election imply about our future and the future of the world? What had I missed that I needed to pay attention to? And especially what did it imply about how I would best devote my energies and attention going forward?

At that moment, Raylin and I were visiting dear friends in their home near Zion National Park, arguably one of the most beautiful places on the planet. Having had very little time off and even less time recently in wild places that sustain, we

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- "Hello..." continued from page 1

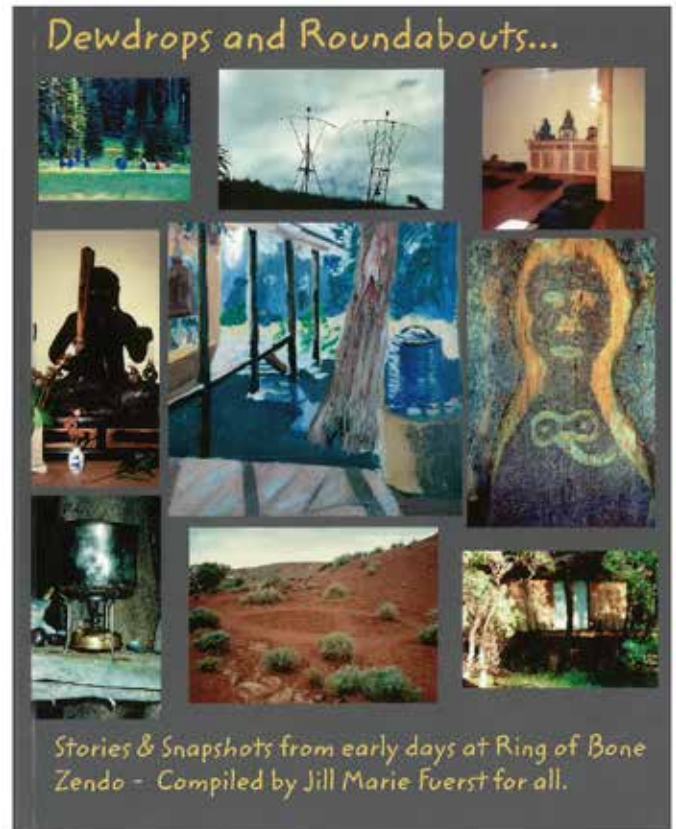
me in and then forgot me. I love seeing our stories doing the work and play of Zendo cushions and Yamabushi trails. These books are for the next generations of the elders you will meet. They are for all to meet and greet the landscapes of Ring of Bone Zendo. ■

Editor Note: Jill's two generously created and donated books will reside in the ROBZ library. Enjoy!

well now...this is just uncanny... gotta admit... 2/29/2020...in writing/edit mode... I just came across this.

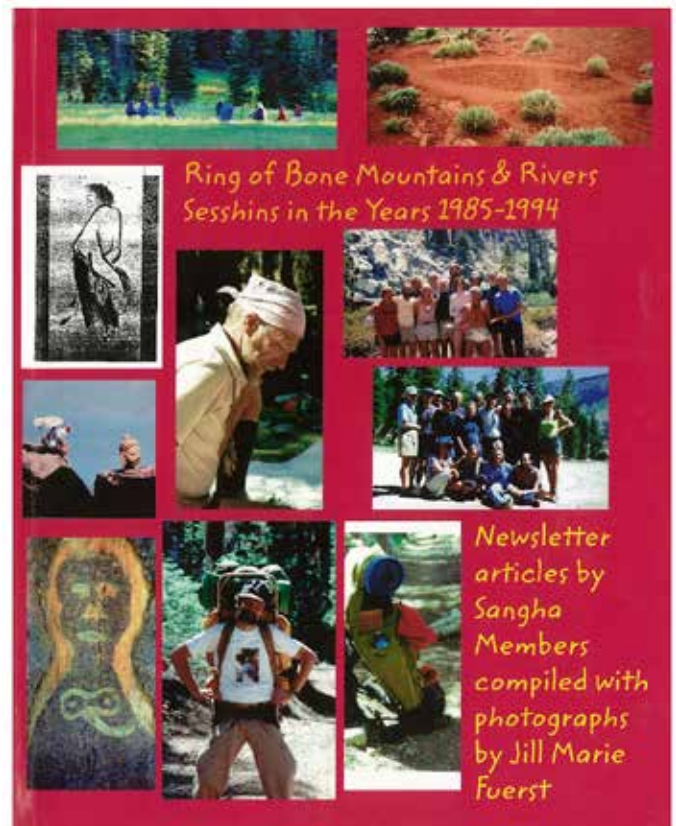
FOR / FROM LEW
by Gary Snyder...Axe Handles published 1983.

"Lew Welch just turned up one day,
live as you and me. "Damn, Lew" I said,
"you didn't shoot yourself after all."
"Yes I did" he said,
and even then I felt the tingling down my back.
"Yes you did, too" I said -- "I can feel it now."
"Yeah" he said.
"There's a basic fear between your world and
mine. I don't know why.
What I came to say was,
teach the children about the cycles.
The life cycles. All other cycles.
That's what it's all about, and it's all forgot."



Stories & Snapshots from early days at Ring of Bone Zendo - Compiled by Jill Marie Fuerst for all.

Book covers with photos and artwork by Jill Marie Fuerst



Ring of Bone Mountains & Rivers Sesshins in the Years 1985-1994

Newsletter articles by Sangha Members compiled with photographs by Jill Marie Fuerst

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had intended to hike, to explore, to be open to the voices of the rocks and the water, to savor, and to enjoy our friends. Instead I almost entirely sequestered myself in my room. Before that point, I had for years paid mostly headline attention to the news. But in that room, for six days, I voraciously read news and analysis from the widest range of sources, meditated, reflected, journaled. I was deeply and broadly troubled and pensive—launching an effort to derive understanding and meaning about this new chapter that had just revealed itself.

During that six day forced retreat, another moment of awakening occurred for me when I heard Barack Obama say that it's critical in a representative democracy for us not to be passive participants, not to leave the leading to the elected representatives. For democracy to flourish and to realize its potential, he said we need to be Engaged Citizens. Without that engaged citizenship, democracy is weakened and imperiled.

So in addition to deepening and broadening my personal practice, re-dedicating my work as right livelihood, and allowing my practice to inform and embody my moment-by-moment relationships with friends and family and neighbors and clients and grocery clerks, I realized a need to understand more fully the callings implied in being an engaged participant in a potentially representative democracy. I needed to know: What would it look like, what would it feel like, how could I become an engaged citizen?

Over the ensuing almost four years, I've felt impelled to continue to deepen and broaden that investigation. I've consulted civically engaged individuals to whom I gravitated and I've consulted politically astute citizens. I've taken on mentors and identified what news sources I would best access regularly to broaden my understanding of contemporary and historical issues and perspectives and to identify potential areas for active engagement.

I launched and facilitate two study groups, both designed to provide support and accountability for pursuing civic learning. Clear from the start that study and learning are essential but only as a foundation for informed action and public engagement, an important

goal of the groups has been to develop communities of co-conspirators with whom to engage in activist initiatives arising from our study.

The first group we call the Engaged Citizens' Study Group. We've read mostly books providing historical, cultural, political and ecological context for contemporary issues. Arising from that study, among so many other themes,



Photo by Jill Marie Fuerst

I realized how central and urgent the causes and effects of the climate and biodiversity crises are to all the other dilemmas. When the Engaged Citizen group members felt saturated (and some, disheartened) with readings about the climate crisis and yet I needed to delve deeper to face and move through the ignorance and despair and grief rather than turn away, the initial group maintained its broader focus, while I simultaneously launched and facilitate a second monthly group, the Climate Activism Study Group. This second

group now includes about 14 participants from at least 5 different local activist organizations.

Soon after the 2016 election, I joined the newly formed local chapter of Indivisible, a group founded nationally by two former congressional aides who developed *The Indivisible Guide*, posted on the Internet within a month of Trump's election. The guide is a roadmap with very clear guidelines and instructions for progressives to engage local, state and federal elected representatives in campaigns to advance progressive causes, also with guidelines for canvassing and mobilizing support for getting out the vote and winning elections. Here was the missing nuts-and-bolts civics lesson I needed for engagement. Through that participation, I've allied with like-minded activists to meet with local officials and members of Congress in support of various initiatives, as well as tracking bills through the legislature and advocating at hearings at the State Capitol.

I've explored and become a part of several climate activist organizations locally. Through 350 Sacramento, I'm on the Legislative Committee through which we track and advocate for climate-related bills at the state level, currently meeting with legislators to support, for example, a bill to ban single-use plastic packaging in California, another to require a minimum of 2,500 foot setback from any oil drilling operation in the state.

In specifically seeking out younger climate activists focused on environmental justice, diversity, and climate justice, I've participated as an elder ally in the multi-racial youth-led local hub of The Sunrise Movement. Through that participation, I've supported climate strikes at the Capitol Building and was a member of a coalition that successfully moved the Sacramento City Council to declare a Climate Emergency. Through both 350 Sacramento and Sunrise Sacramento, for the past 18 months I've monitored and supported the Mayors' Commission on Climate Change, an intensive community initiative that developed bold recommendations for transforming the cities of Sacramento and West Sacramento to carbon zero by 2045. In June the final report was passed unanimously, with very ambitious

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goals and initiatives, and then was just accepted unanimously by the Sacramento City Council, a major victory for the local climate movement.

Most immediately important, realizing that we're approaching the most consequential Presidential election in my lifetime which would directly and significantly affect all of the six interconnected crises, I had planned to travel to swing states 90 days before the election to canvas door-to-door. Not possible under COVID, instead I've found other ways to reach swing state voters. Raylin and I are writing postcards and doing texting for numerous campaigns, to win the White House and flip the Senate and retain the House, texting at least two to three hours per day, intending to keep that up till November 3. We've identified that work as the highest priority.

All these are examples of what has emerged from my pursuit of engaged citizenship. I've found allies, mentors, guides, tools and techniques, learning aids, and support—none of which I knew existed prior to starting this leg of the journey. It's as if I felt a calling to begin exploring, started on the journey, turned a corner, and there were allies and mentors waiting for me.

I recount all this not to draw attention to what I'm doing but to report the discovery of how rapidly and wonderfully this unsuspected new path—or this extension of my old path—appeared once I looked, once I began to answer the call.

The world, I believe, is calling desperately. As Greta Thunberg says, "The world is on fire." The question is: "What are we going to do about it?" We can read about the issues, and that reading is critical. We can sit on our cushion, and I believe that meditation and reflection are critical. We can discuss with others, and I certainly believe such mutual exploration is vitally important. But unless we act, decisively and publicly, we give over our common realm to those who would lie and steal and buy favor and plunder.

Those who suffer most are not me and Raylin, and probably not you. Those who suffer most are those who contributed least to these crises. They are largely disenfranchised and historically underrepresented human beings, many of whom are people of color. And they are

also the deer and the bear and the raptors and the songbirds and the oaks and the mice and the bio-regions and ecosystems that are being plundered by those who aren't listening and won't listen.

The trees have a voice; the mountaintops have a voice; the watersheds have a voice, but most legislators can't hear them. Since we can hear them, if we listen, we can advocate for them; we can be their voice.

The call is clear, and it's getting louder. If you sit, you can hear it. I guarantee if you act, if you engage, if you give voice to the trees in the office of a representative or via text banking to a potential voter in a swing state or through civil disobedience if Trump is re-elected, you will hear the voices of the trees louder. And if you act as an engaged citizen in the way that only you can act, showing up decisively and publically related to the six crises, others will hear the voices of the trees as well. ■

RING OF BONE ZENDO CALENDAR OF EVENTS

IMPORTANT 2021 CALENDAR NOTE

Because of the circumstances of the pandemic, we have decided not to schedule our usual events for 2021. We will try to gather for zazen, sesshin, and other events, as much as possible. But because all our gatherings have to be outside, we can't predict into 2021 what we will be able to offer. We will send out emails as far in advance as possible for future events, including sesshin.

NOW IS THE TIME TO RENEW FOR 2021!

IMPORTANT MEMBERSHIP NOTE

Again, these strange times present us with a challenge regarding membership categories. Folks typically choose a membership category based on what they anticipate their level of involvement will be. Instead this year, because we don't know what events or sesshin we will hold, we will keep everyone at the same membership category that they chose last year. Please send your \$40.00 membership dues to:

Cindy Leeson
P.O. Box 676
Colfax, CA 95713

If you are strapped for funds, you can forego paying dues, and still remain ROBZ members in good standing.



SESSHIN LEADER POOLS

Sangha members interested in a leadership position should contact the appropriate pool leader. If you are listed in a pool and your availability has changed, please advise the pool leader (named in **bold italic**).

TANTO: Judyth Collin, Kate Duroux, Allan Finlay, Reed Hamilton, Eric Larsen, Greg Leeson, Cindy Leeson, **Jenny Long**, Andrew Mason, Steve Mulford, Nate Popik, Jim Pyle, Masa Uehara

JIKIJITSU: Sheelo Bohm, Kate Duroux, Suzanna Elkin, Allan Finlay, Susan Finlay, **Reed Hamilton**, Michael Keown, Eric Larsen, Cindy Leeson, Greg Leeson, Jenny Long, Andrew Mason, Steve Mulford, Nate Popik, Jim Pyle

JISHA: Sheelo Bohm, Judyth Collin, Kate Duroux, Allan Finlay, Sue Finlay, Reed Hamilton, Eric Larsen, Cindy Leeson, **Greg Leeson**, Jenny Long, Andrew Mason, Chris Mulford, Steve Mulford, Nate Popik, Jim Pyle

INO: Johanna Bangeman, Judyth Collin, Kate Duroux, Anne Dutton, Susan Finlay, Eric Larsen, **Cindy Leeson**, Greg Leeson, Elizabeth Lewis, Jenny Long, Andrew Mason, Steve Mulford, Nate Popik, Dana Turner, Masa Uehara

TENZO: Sheelo Bohm, **Judyth Collin**, Kate Duroux, Michael Keown, Andrew Mason, Chris Mulford, Steve Mulford

SESSHIN COORDINATOR: Sheelo Bohm, Judyth Collin, Reed Hamilton, **Michael Keown**, Eric Larsen, Cindy Leeson, Greg Leeson, Steve Mulford, Jim Pyle, Masa Uehara, Jay Veazey, Lynne Westerfield

DĀNA

Your generosity is a gift that not only supports ROBZ, but also the teacher, the Sangha, the larger Dharma community, and your own practice. You can direct your gift to a particular fund or project, such as the Teachers Fund, General Fund, Building Fund, Sangha Assistance Fund, or make a split gift. All undesignated gifts go to the general fund. Please use "tithe.ly" for donations.

Donations to can also be mailed to:

ROBZ, PO Box 1525, Nevada City, CA 95959

We appreciate your spirit of giving!

For membership fees, send checks made out to ROBZ to Cindy Leeson. For sesshin fees, send checks made out to ROBZ to the sesshin coordinator.

GENERAL INQUIRIES & ADDRESS CHANGES

Please send general inquiries and changes of your contact information to:

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NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS

Submissions of original artwork, poetry, articles, photographs or anything else that might be of interest to the sangha are appreciated. Please send any materials to:

The deadline for the next issue will be **April 1st, 2021**

If you would like to become more involved with creating this newsletter, please write to the editor at the above email address.



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