

## ***Temple of the Three Gates: With Thich Nhat Hanh in Vietnam*** by Jackie Randolph

**Prologue:** The internet, Sangha, temples, Stupas, healing the chasms, 2 factions of Buddhism, Precepts Recitation, wonderful people, beautiful people, DMZ, agent orange, dynastic meals and culinary delights, Dharma talks, Tet, the Oracles of Kieu, walking meditations through Đông Ba Market and downtown Ho Chi Minh City, Generosity, gifts given, gifts received, large and small. Phap Van doing the Hokey Pokey, Br. Doungh Minh, Thay's nephew, farewell songs from monks,



Brother from the hood—Calihood. Video, pics, standup Buddhist comedy, jokes about a busload of "silent" Buddhists, Bao Loc, Fragrant Palm Leaves, mountains, Perfume Rivers, motor bikes, bus drivers, Nunnery Dieu Nghiem, Dharma sister of 92 years, Thành Trung's Ancestral Altar, Linh Mụ and releasing fishes to pray for longevity, Grand Palace, the Imperial Citadel, dynastic tombs, Vietnamese wedding pudding, hand made Origami coconut leaf boxes, Sr. Chong Kong's tour of special places at the root temple, retreats in a pine forest, Supreme Venerable, the 3 Gates, we have arrived—no place else to go.

### **TEMPLE OF THE THREE GATES**

Từ Hiếu PAGODA—The Eden of Thay's youth. This was the most compelling reason for me to make this journey. To be there, to witness and to partake of homecoming, the root temple and to history. However it was only upon departure with tears of joy intermingled with tears of sadness, did I begin to realize that I was home, our home, my root temple, our root temple. In every heart-space, on many levels, for many lifetimes.

Greeted at the airport in Hue by monks in saffron robes. Thousands of Sangha members bearing roses, Buddhist flags, bows and lotuses, and great hearts full of gratitude and prayerful anticipation. Embracing at last, one who has been their venerable teacher for so long—from so long ago. After the airport procession, we retrieved our luggage and reconvened at the buses that would take us to the 1st Gate. Assembling the 4-fold community, the International Sangha representing over 30 countries; evidence and living examples of the Way of Mindfulness.



A Great Bell announces our arrival. Yellow umbrellas tasseled with rainbow fringe are held uprightly. Novices carrying flowers and perfuming the air with incense, while musicians clad in traditional costume, blue as an indigo sunrise playing instruments and songs of yore.

Through the gate a beautiful site to behold for as far as the eye can see! On either side of the narrow road, gray robes solemnly holding candles uprightly. There were so many of them! Young and old, yin and yang, little ones, middle ones, parents, elders, and those marked by agent orange—still—3 generations later . . .



Up, up, up we go, carry-on luggage in tow. The weight of which was lightened by eyes so full of reverence and love, and staffs of tall pine trees lining the path upon which we tread, the same path all beings here shared. "Where does it end?" I asked, "Where does it all end, when does it end?"

At the top of the hill a brilliant red-lettered banner declaring: RESPECTIVELY WELCOMING HOME THE MOST VENERABLE THICH NHAT HANH THE SUPREME ELDER OF TU HIEU ROOT TEMPLE AND WELCOME TO THE INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST DELEGATION OF THE PLUM VILLAGE SANGHA.

"Ah," I thought, "at last we've reached our destination." We processed beneath the banner through a Second Gate, but "had my eyes deceived

me?" More robes and floating candles as far as the eye could see, again! It was like looking beyond a small valley, down a mountain, then up—again! "Perhaps there were thousands here, not hundreds." I was near disbelief. It was difficult to gage in this familiar yet unknown place.

Repositioning the very heavy attachments on my back and shoulders . . . I marched on. (Later upon reflection I wondered, why were the temples we visited all situated atop a hill? At end of each town or hamlet was a beautiful pagoda, beyond which there were forest and nothing much else. Ummm...)

Not quite a hundred yards from where we trekked, down the hill the pavement bordered the threshold of... well... we clearly had arrived at a special place, as if we weren't already there. Where the pavement met the red dust. Just a small patch about ten feet long and as wide as the structure before us. Red dust that greets us: "are you here as a reminder of what we leave behind? Red dust of a material world, over which we cross to another place and time?" A few paces across this sparse and inevitable chasm we pass through the triple arch -- the Third and final Gate.

Behold the Half Moon Pond! Across the pond is Thay, smiling broadly, waving and delighted to be on the steps of his beloved pond. Warm eyes recollecting the fond memories of a young novice and monk who last tread these steps a lifetime ago. Didn't that say it all?



We lingered at the pond a short while, a chance to catch our breath and survey for the first time this magical place. Pine forest, cherry bamboo, lotuses floating upon more ponds, a thatched hut retreat, a vegetable garden. All the scents of home sweet home. Continuing up the hill a narrow path leading to steps, the first steps mounted on this journey from the now distant caravan of buses.

A pause, a breath, a tender touching of the stone balustrade at the culminating point of the final ascent. A touch to steady, to prepare, to step mindfully upon entering the center space of the temple grounds. As witnessed so many times before, paying homage at the alter, touching

the earth, sharing gifts, and a reciprocal honoring of Thay; but this time in the place where it all began.

A little while after the formalities were over, I saw a child moving faster than I've ever seen, hardly able to contain the joy within, peeking in, peeking out, looking this way and looking that way. A door creaks open, a head and ears peers through, the door widening as eyes recognize and remember a place—still and unchanged.

*Pictures from the Plum Village website. Other photos available from Thay's trip to Vietnam at [www.mindfulnessdc.org](http://www.mindfulnessdc.org).*

### **WMC Financial Report 2004** *by Joseph Byrne*

Financially, 2004 was a fairly normal year. Thich Nhat Hanh did not come to town and so the WMC was not flush with ticket revenue (90% of which goes to the Unified Buddhist Church, the umbrella entity for Thich Nhat Hanh-affiliated monasteries and communities). Most of the WMC's income came from the dana box and retreats, and most of the expenses went to bi-yearly donations to the Vihara and simple operating expenses, with an extra \$146 in the coffers at year's end.

However, some of the numbers below seem to belie this simple account. Where did most of that \$45,692 come from and where did it go? And what of that \$4,400 that came in as the result of the Thich Nhat Hanh lecture that I just said didn't happen in 2004? Let me account for those two things as well.

I reported in my financial report for 2003 that \$33,460 in proceeds from the Thich Nhat Hanh DC lecture in September 2003 was sent to the Unified Buddhist Church. All that was true, but unfortunately the check was lost in the mail somewhere between Washington, DC, and the Green Mountain Dharma Center in Vermont. This was discovered early in 2004 and a new check was sent out shortly thereafter. So that \$33,460 was on the books for part of 2004 and so is accounted for below, though the check has since been cashed and that money is no longer in our account. There are probably some accountant-like procedures one does in such cases to move the money around but I am not an accountant, so there it is.

Regarding the \$4,400 from Thay's lecture, that also came in late. That money was from Olson's Books in Alexandria which sold tickets for the lecture. It should have come in fiscal year 2003 but they somehow lost the accounting of ticket sales and it took some nudging from sangha member Scott Schang, in beautifully crafted legal language (Scott is a lawyer), to get Olson's to track down the money and send it to us. Once we received it, per our arrangement with Thay, we kept 10% of the proceeds and sent the rest to the Unified Buddhist Church (\$4,000).

And that is it for financial excitement for 2004. If anyone sees any mistakes in the math below, please contact me and I'll make corrections. English literature is my expertise, not math!

## WMC Income 2004

<u>Source</u>	<u>Income</u>
Charter Hall Winter Retreat	\$750
Charter Hall Spring Retreat	\$850
Charter Hall Fall Retreat	\$800
subtotal:	\$2,400
Thich Nhat Hanh Lecture (2003) (delayed payment from Olson Books)	\$4,400
subtotal	\$4,400
General Donation	
From WMC dana box	\$3,384
subtotal:	\$3,384
<b>TOTAL INCOME:</b>	<b>\$10,184</b>

## WMC Expenses 2004

<u>Recipient</u>	<u>Expense</u>
TNH Lecture Proceeds (to GMDC)	\$4,000
subtotal:	\$4,000
Board Allocation to the Vihara	\$2,000
Board Allocation for Change Your Mind Day	\$500
subtotal:	\$2,500
Retreat Scholarships Awarded	\$0
subtotal:	\$0
Phone Bill	\$200
Post Office Box	\$100
Magazine Subscription	\$40
Printing	\$190
Postage	\$182
Books & CDs (WMC Library)	\$426
subtotal:	\$1,138
Charter Hall Retreats	\$2,400
subtotal:	\$2,400
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES 2004:</b>	<b>\$10,038</b>
<b>TOTAL INCOME 2004:</b>	<b>\$10,184</b>
difference:	\$146
Beginning Balance 2004:	\$45,692
Ending Balance 2004:	\$12,086

***Clearness Committees***  
***by Richard Brady***

At times Sangha members find themselves facing difficult decisions or engaged in conflicts where a discernment process of a spiritual nature may be needed in order to move ahead. The clearness committee process, developed by the Quakers, can be a very useful one at such times. The Community Care Committee is interested in its potential benefit for the WMC. The clearness process has already been used by one Sangha member. A description of the process follows. If you are interested in getting more information about the process or in setting up a clearness meeting, please get in touch with Richard Brady at [bradyr@sidwell.edu](mailto:bradyr@sidwell.edu).

The process begins with the individual or conflicted parties choosing three or four (mutually agreed upon) people to form a clearness committee and setting a date for a meeting that will last for an agreed upon time (usually two to three hours). Next, the focus person or people (I will assume there is one in what follows) writes a short (one to two page) statement laying out the situation and gives it to each committee member at least one week in advance of the meeting. Before the meeting a clerk of the committee is chosen, if possible, someone who has experience with the clearness process.

The clerk starts the clearness meeting with a period of meditation. Followed this, the focus person has a chance to update the statements that the committee members have already received. Then committee members have the opportunity to ask questions to clarify particular things mentioned in the statement. These questions should be factual in nature, not probing ones.

The heart of the clearness process occurs next as members of the committee ask questions which can help the focus person gain a deeper understanding of the matter. These questions are not leading questions, nor solutions disguised as questions, but questions like, "Where do you feel this situation in your body?" or "What emotions come up for you as you think about this?" Time for silence is given after each question to let the focus person sit with the question and then answer it if this seems right.

The clerk stops the clearness meeting about fifteen minutes before its scheduled end and checks with the focus person to see whether clarity has been arrived at or if another meeting should be scheduled. Finally the members of the committee are invited to share how the process was for them. The proceedings of clearness meetings are completely confidential, not discussed by the committee members outside the meeting even with each other or with the focus person.

### **Touching the Earth**

They says the practice of Touching the Earth is to return to the Earth, to our roots, to our ancestors, and to recognize that we are not alone but connected to a whole stream of spiritual and blood ancestors. We are their continuation and with them, will continue into the future generations. We touch the earth to let go of the idea that we are separate and to remind us that we are the Earth and part of Life.

Those of us who have been practicing the Touching the Earth ceremony at the Vihara have felt this connectedness to the earth and each other. The ceremony helps us renew and reinforce our practice which is why we also call it "the beginning anew ceremony."

As we bow in gratitude to our bodhisattva ancestors and touch the earth with our foreheads and palms facing up, it reminds us that we have much to be grateful for including our families, sangha, teachers, and the dharma. The ceremony involves an incense offering, shared readings, and touching the earth as we place our forehead on the floor, palms face up, and bow in gratitude. The ceremony ends with a guided meditation. We welcome everyone to join us as we continue our practice of Touching the Earth.

***Poems About Death and Dying***  
***By Bill Menza***

**How To Be With the Dying or Dead**

How am I to be  
With the dying?  
With the living dead?  
With the dead?

To be with them,  
Be with them  
As you would be with yourself,  
In the present moment,  
With this out-breath.

With an empty self  
Open to all things,  
Connected to all things,  
Intimately with the oneness  
Of life and death.

**Death**

We are with you at this time.  
When there is no birth or Death.

Only transformation.  
A returning to what we once were.  
A returning to the source of what we  
are.

For now, for us, here and there,  
There is only the Path,  
The Way,  
Nirvana,  
Oneness.

**Why Can't Death Be Appreciated?**

Why can't death be appreciated,  
Just like life is.  
Is it not just another mind-body state,  
That arises and passes away?

**Death Visits Often**

Death visits often,  
Sometimes suddenly  
Sometimes over time.  
I am of the nature to die. I will die.  
You are of the nature to die. You will  
die.

Death is life. Life is death.  
There is no birth; there is no death.  
Only letting go  
Back to what we were.

The rain travels to the river,  
The river to the ocean,  
And the ocean to the rain.  
All is one.  
One is all.

For a brief time  
There is only togetherness  
With constant change.



Spring 2005 - Page 7

***Spoken Like a True Buddha: A series of stories edited by Carolyn Cleveland Schena and Sharron Mendel to appear in the Mindfulness Bell***

"When you are alienated from your roots, you seek Buddhas.  
When you are in touch (with who you really are), you are a Buddha."  
- *Thich Nhat Hanh*

Time and again, the power of one story has brought healing and inspiration in our lives. Other mindfulness practitioners' sharings about how they have overcome challenges in both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances has kept us going in difficult times. We thought it would be wonderful to collect these stories and to share them with others. Thus began our venture into creating a book, a "borderless sangha" that could bring powerful stories to people whether or not they had a regular sangha with which to practice. Oddly enough, even though we did not know it at the time, we would need just such a resource as we ventured into new lives where there are no established sanghas.

The process of the book began with a call for submissions that was distributed during Thay's 2003 North American tour and via e-mail to sanghas worldwide. We received stories from practitioners around the world. Each author spoke about how they were integrating the practice into everyday life in their work, whether as psychologists or teachers, in their relationships with their spouses, children and dying parents, and in the tumultuous world of politics. The intimacy, authenticity, and deep insight we found in these stories caused us to entitle the collection "Spoken Like a True Buddha," for many of the authors were speaking from a place in which they were in touch with who they really were. Initially, we had conceived of the creation of a book, but upon reflection, we realized that although we had collected a number of stories, ultimately we did not have the quantity needed for the creation of a full-fledged book. The Mindfulness Bell became the perfect place to distribute these stories to be shared with the world-wide sangha. The first story, written by Nancy Hom, appeared in the most recent issue. The next issue of the Mindfulness Bell will have even more stories!

We are grateful to a number of dharma teachers and friends who supported the growth of this project, including Thay, Sr. Chan Khong, Anh Huong and Thu Nguyen, Richard Brady, Mitchell Ratner, Jack Lawlor (Lakeside Buddha Sangha), Sr. Chau Nghiem (Plum Village), and Sumi Loudon, author, with Jack Kornfield, of Blue Jean Buddha, and finally Paul Mahon, who supported us wholeheartedly during critical junctures.

The stories we received had an uncanny way of speaking to us directly, providing nourishment and healing to us both as we went through our own life changes. After completing the organizing of Thay's mindfulness retreat with Congress, Carolyn moved to the Outer Banks of North Carolina. She and her new husband Gary Schena opened STUDIO 12, a paint-your-own-pottery business. Carolyn and Gary are now re-inventing themselves as local artists, and Carolyn is delighted to be drawing upon her undergraduate education where she studied fine art. Sharron and her former husband finalized their divorce with a ceremony of gratitude and blessings, and after 16 years away, she returned to her home town of Birmingham, Alabama. There she is the new Executive Director of Friends of the Railroad District, Inc., a nonprofit that is partnering

with the City to build a park that will transform the way people live, work and play in downtown Birmingham.

Both of us have begun the process of creating of our own sanghas. It has made us even more grateful for the years of practice we had with the Washington, DC-area mindfulness community. Sharron's meditation group was appropriately birthed on the celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day!

---

Carolyn Cleveland Schena, Peaceful Flower of the Heart, sits regularly with her husband and friends on Hatteras Island on the Outer Banks of North Carolina. She can be reached at 252-995-7899 or carolyn@studio12hatteras.com. Sharron Mendel, Compassionate Vow of the Heart, now sits with a small group in her home in Irondale Alabama. She can be reached at 205-401-7541 or sharron\_mendel@mindspring.com.

### ***Mindfully Rocking Out at WAVE AID*** **by Joseph Byrne**



Who says mindfulness is incompatible with a rocking good time? On March 10, 2005, a number of mindfulness practitioners—and members of the Washington Mindfulness Community—participated in a fund-raiser for Tsunami relief, called WAVE AID, organized by sangha member Annie Sidley, and held at the eminent State Theatre in Falls Church, VA. The show opened up with the booming djembe and dun drums of the activist drumming group The Rhythm Workers Union (RWU). And who was that shaking his shakers

(and booty), but Joseph Byrne, sangha member and mindful rhythm-maker. Unfortunately, RWU was a little *too* much on the ball: they managed to play their set in the specified time allotted, before the photographer had a chance to set up and snap a pic.

RWU was followed by The Skiddz, a band featuring Bernie Stoltz and Joe Catazano of the WMC (check out their website below to see pics of Bernie and Joe when they had big hair!). The Skiddz didn't exactly bring the show to a grinding halt. They rocked the audience into the stratosphere.

Annie Sidley, who not only organized the event (along with Danielle Westphal), and acted as emcee for the evening, lent her golden voice to a number of acts, including



Radio Mosaic and Sugarbear. She also had a set of her own near the end of the show. Joining her on the drums was a major musical star-in-the-making, none other than Annie's son Sean Sidley (*not* the balding guy in the picture).

Husband Steve Sidley was not to be left out. In fact, with his new band Sugarbear, he closed out the show. And a humdinger of a closing it was. Anyone who's seen Steve's



intense banging on the bass guitar (or maybe we should say "inviting the bass guitar to play"?) knows this is a mindful man who's laying down the bass line. And if you get up and dance (as many were in the course of the evening), enlightenment can't be far behind.

This mindful party, if audience response is any indication, was a great success. More of an audience (more folks making donations) would have been nice, but the folks who came certainly learned about the issue and compassionate responses to the destruction caused by the Tsunami in December (proceeds went

Unicef, American Red Cross, Catholic Relief Services, and the Washington Buddhist Vihara). They also learned, whether they knew it or not, that Buddhists can boogie with the best of them.

**Check out their websites (and come to a performance soon):**

The Rhythm Workers Union: [www.rhythmworkersunion.org](http://www.rhythmworkersunion.org)

The Skiddz: [www.skiddsrock.com](http://www.skiddsrock.com)

Annie Sidley: [www.anniesidley.com](http://www.anniesidley.com)

Sugarbear (formerly Sam's House): [www.samshouse.com](http://www.samshouse.com)

## WMC Calendar

**WMC Meditation and Dharma Discussion:** Every Sun., 7-9:15 p.m., at the Buddhist Vihara, 5017 16th Street NW, Washington, DC. Sitting and walking meditation, taped dharma talk by Thich Nhat Hanh, followed by discussion. Everyone is welcome. More info: 301-681-1036; [www.mindfulnessdc.org](http://www.mindfulnessdc.org)

- On the **first Sunday** of the month: "**Touching the Earth**" Practice. Next meeting to be announced on the WMC listserv.
- On the **second Sunday** of the month: **Live Dharma!** Throughout the year, the WMC hosts dharma teachers on the second Sunday of the month. The evening begins with a **potluck at 5:15**. Check the WMC website for dates and speakers.
- On the **third Sunday** of the month: **Dharma Class**. A chance for sangha members to share their wisdom! At 5:30pm, at the Vihara. For speaker and topic, consult WMC website.
- On the **fourth Sunday** of the month: **New Comers Orientation**. At the Vihara starting at 6 pm.



Spring 2005 - Page 10

**Second Body Practice:** A wonderful way to strengthen mindfulness practice and build deeper relationships with one another in the sangha. Latest round just starting. More info: Steve Sidley at (301)655-2605 or [secondbody@aol.com](mailto:secondbody@aol.com).

**WMC Study Groups:** Meeting as a group for six weeks to discuss a book by Thich Nhat Hanh or other dharma teachers. Next group will be announced on the WMC listserv.

**WMC Newcomer Orientation:** Last Sunday each month, 6-7pm, before the regular sitting. Open to all, especially newcomers. Informal orientation available on other Sundays; call or e-mail to arrange. More...

**WMC Retreats:** At Charter Hall, on the Susquehanna River. This Fall. To be announced on WMC listserv and posted at: [www.mindfulnessdc.org](http://www.mindfulnessdc.org)

### Other DC Area Sanghas

**Mindfulness Practice Center of Fairfax (MPCF):** At the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax, 2709 Hunter Mill Road, Oakton, Va. Morning sitting & walking meditation: Mon.-Fri., 8:15 a.m. Mid-day meditation: Thurs., noon. Mindful movement: Tues., 4:15 p.m. Evening meditation: Thurs., 7:30 p.m. Please call 703-938-1377 to confirm. More info: [www.mpcf.org](http://www.mpcf.org).

**Practicing the Art of Mindful Living (MPCF):** All-day workshops with Anh-Huong and Thu Nguyen; donation: \$30-50. info: [www.mpcf.org](http://www.mpcf.org).

**MPCF Classes:** Consult MPCF website for latest classes.

**Still Water Mindfulness Practice Center:** Sitting meditation and reading: Mon., Wed., Fri., 6:30-7:30 a.m.; Practice evening: Thurs., 7:30 p.m.; at Crossings - Center for Healing Traditions, 8505 Fenton Street, Suite 202, Silver Spring, Md. (above Whole Foods Market). Contact Mitchell Ratner, 301-270-8353, [info@StillwaterMPC.org](mailto:info@StillwaterMPC.org), [www.stillwatermpc.org](http://www.stillwatermpc.org)

**Still Water Classes:** Consult Still Water website for latest classes.

**Boat of Compassion (Thuyen Tu) Sangha:** Mindful day, first Sat. each month, 10-5 p.m., except April and October, when mindful retreat is held. Giac Hoang Temple, 5401 16th St. NW; more info: 703-938-9606, 301-294-7966, [www.crpcv.org/thuyentu](http://www.crpcv.org/thuyentu).

**Capitol Hill Mindfulness Practice:** Sitting meditation: Wednesday evenings, 7:30-8:30 p.m. Healing Arts of Capitol Hill 320 G Street NE (3 blocks from Union Station) Call 202-544-9389 ext. 3 for more information.

**Arlington Mindfulness Practice:** Practice Evening: Monday, 7:30 p.m. Contact: Peter Guerrero, 703-820-1524, [pfguerrero@aol.com](mailto:pfguerrero@aol.com).

**Annapolis Mindfulness Practice:** Practice Evening: Thursdays, 7-8:30 p.m., and Sundays from 11a.m. until noon, at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis, 333 Dubois Rd.

Contact: Art Hansen, 410-216-9551, [arthansen@comcast.net](mailto:arthansen@comcast.net)



Spring 2005 - Page 11

**Columbia Mindfulness Practice:** Practice Evening: first Monday of month, 7-8:30 p.m. Kittamaqundi Community Church, 5410 Leafreader Way.  
Contact: Judy Colligan, 410-730-4712.

**Baltimore Mindfulness Practice (Fresh Breeze Sangha):** Practice Day: Saturday, 8:30-10:30 a.m., at Govans Presbyterian Church, 5824 York Road, in Baltimore. Call or email for directions. Contact: Carol Fegan, 410-323-2180, freshbreeze@earthlink.net

### Other Classes & Workshops

**Being Solid, Being Free: Practicing the Art of Mindful Living.** A Weekend Retreat with Meditation Teachers Anh-Huong Nguyen and Thu Nguyen. **May 27 - 29, 2005**, at Claymont Court, Charles Town, West Virginia. For more info and to register: (703) 938-1377.

**Mindfulness Retreat with Sr. Annabel Laity: Fri-Sun, May 20-22**, in Aston, PA (just outside Philadelphia). Sponsored by the Willow Branch Sangha.

**Being a Compassionate Companion Workshop: Sat-Sun, June 4-5.** A Two day workshop with Frank Ostaseski, founder of the Zen Hospice Project and Alaya Institute. Sponsored by Joseph's House.

**Zen of the Body 1-Day Retreat: Saturday, June 11**, 9:30am - 5 pm. Led by Jeanine Cogan at a small retreat center 50 minutes from Washington DC. \$99 per person. For more information, contact Jeanine at JCogan5573@aol.com.

**Change Your Mind Day DC: Saturday, June 4, 1 - 5pm** at St. Stephen and the Incarnation Episcopal Church, at 16th and Newton Streets NW (just north of All Souls Unitarian Church and not far from the Colombia Height Metro stop).