



*Zen Center's
original home,
Sokoji Temple,
on Bush Street*

Early History of Zen Center

In 1969 while Suzuki-roshi was still alive and Zen Center was still at Sokoji, Peter Schneider compiled a number of interviews for the Wind Bell into an early history of Zen Center (1959-1969). This project is interesting now both for what it says about Zen Center's earliest years as well as the perspectives of 1969.

—M.W.

Suzuki-roshi: As soon as I finished my schooling I asked my Master if I could go abroad somewhere, but he became furious. I said, "America." He said "No." "Hokkaido?" "No." He wouldn't allow me to go and I gave up my notion for a long, long time until I forgot all about it. Then sixteen years ago I had a chance to come to America, but I hadn't finished fixing the main building at Rinso-in, which was the duty left me by master. In 1959, when I finished what he had told me to do, I decided to come.

At that time Sokoji Temple in San Francisco was in confusion, and the resident priest of Sokoji who was Bishop of America, Tobase-roshi, asked headquarters to send someone to help him. Headquarters appointed several people but they would not accept the position. The people who wanted to come, Headquarters could not accept. My friend, who was Director of Headquarters, didn't know what to do, and he said jokingly, "Why don't you go?" Since I would be new at Sokoji, I thought to myself that I would be free from the confusion there and that I would

have more freedom to do things. And in a month when my friend came again, I said to him, "I will go." He was amazed.

Wind Bell: Did he want you to go?

Suzuki-roshi: Not so much, because he felt responsible for my temple. I lived quite near him.

Wind Bell: When did you arrive?

Suzuki-roshi: May twenty-third, 1959.

Wind Bell: When did students begin sitting with you?

Suzuki-roshi: Maybe one month after my arrival.

Jean Ross: For some time he was really all alone by himself. As you know, the Japanese congregation wasn't too demanding of his time. And he was just waiting for the sangha to come and want to do meditation. Bill McNeill and his wife were the first ones to arrive. Della and Betty and I had taken a course in Zen Buddhism at the American Academy of Asian Studies (Fall 1958 to Spring 1959) from Dr. Kato and he had Reverend Suzuki come to lecture to us. When the semester was over we asked Dr. Kato how we could continue and he said, "Well, you met Reverend Suzuki and he's starting a meditation group at Sokoji Temple in San Francisco. Why don't you go and see what it's like?"

Bill Kwong: I used to deliver mail in Palo Alto and I read this story about Roshi in *Nichibei Times*. It said that he had this bird, and one of the students, maybe it was Bill McNeill, asked him why, if he believed in freedom, he kept the bird in a cage. So he let the bird out. This story really impressed me very much, so I decided to come and see what is happening.

Della Goertz: And the cat got the bird. Remember, Betty, we felt so badly about it, and *he* felt badly about it.

Paul Alexander: I came to California in 1960 and it took me about six months to find Zen Center. I didn't want to go to Alan Watts and ask is there a practicing group. I had read *The Spirit of Zen* and *The Way of Zen* at that point, and when I read *The Way of Zen*, I finished the last page and then went back to the first and read it all over again. I admired him very much as a writer, but I didn't want to attend what was called "seminar". That wasn't the kind of Zen I was looking for. I was looking for a practicing group and kind of suspected that it was here because I had read *The Dharma Bums* and it just seemed that this ought to be the place where it was at. I went to the Asian Academy and inquired if there were a practicing group, but unfortunately I got there at a time when there were no classes in session and Dr. Kato wasn't around. I looked in the phone directory and there was nothing under 'Zen'. I went down to Chinatown and found the Chan and Tao societies, but they looked very forbidding from the outside, and I didn't quite think this was it anyhow. I looked up the Buddhist Churches of America headquarters on Octavia Street, which now has a bookstore in connection with it, and they could not help me, or whoever was there could not help me. I went over to Berkeley and went to the Shin Center there, and there were Caucasians around. They could offer me lessons in Japanese and Sanskrit but no practicing Zen or anything like that. At that point I decided, well, I'll just bide my time, I guess.

nothing's going on. And then, I think it was about the middle of November, suddenly right in the middle of a page in *The Chronicle* was this picture of a zen abbot who was visiting San Francisco. This was Abbot Koho. And they gave the address and the time and I appeared an hour early so I would be sure to get a seat. I immediately knew that this was it. Several of the older students were sitting on the mats around the place, or appeared and didn't sit, and Bishop Yamada was here at this point, and Suzuki-roshi.

Phillip Wilson: I came to Zen Center with an old drunk the first time. It was Sunday and the sun was shining and we were walking up and down the streets and we went and listened to the Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. I was very impressed. This was in Chinatown and after that we came up here and we went to a Sunday Zen lecture. There was a little man standing up at the altar who looked like a samurai. He kept talking to everyone and he kept smiling and I thought, well, this is going to be a nice fifteen-minute lecture. I looked around at all the Japanese people and they were all very quiet and the lecture went on and on. After the lecture there was a ritual and the ritual went on and on. It was all in Japanese, the whole thing. I thought, this guy is too important to talk to. I like him very much, but I couldn't say anything to him. But later I called on the telephone and said something about religious organization or something—I couldn't get my words straight—after I was through talking he said, "Please come."

Grahame Petchey: At a weekend lecture we attended at the Berkeley Shin Center, I think it must have been some time in June of 1961, about three weeks after we'd arrived in the United States, I met Dr. Kato and he introduced me to Suzuki-roshi and I went along to see him the following day. But I came in the middle of evening zazen and waited in the office outside. The only sound I could hear was people breathing, and they just seemed to go on breathing for a long time, and then the noise of the bells and eventually the sutra. And I remember sitting there on that couch watching the people coming out of the zendo. The first thing that struck me about the students was the fact that they were all dressed in bluejeans and tartan shirts and looked, to an Englishman's eyes, like workers rather than the kind of middle-class Buddhists that I'd been used to in the U.K. or in Europe. Anyway, Suzuki-roshi had asked me to come at the wrong time, at six o'clock for zazen instead of at five-thirty. So after an hour's talk he said, "Let's go down and do zazen." And I remember very, very clearly his sitting next to me at the back of the zendo talking about the way to sit and the way to breathe. He said, "Now just keep on counting your breath until your mind becomes calm." We sat for about half an hour. I was rather surprised that my mind didn't become calm. And half an hour seemed like an incredibly long time, I remember, since in London we had been told that anything longer than five or ten minutes was dangerous or something, and anyway, I'd only been used to sitting in a chair before that time. So I really felt I was getting with the Orient.

Dick Baker: I was in Fields' Book Store with a friend, David Walker, in the summer of 1961. I was telling him about a samurai movie, and had raised my imaginary sword and let out a samurai sort of yell, when George Fields looked up from his table and said, "You ought to go see Suzuki-roshi, the Zen master who is here in town." So I put away my imaginary sword and said, "Oh, yeah?" And he said, "He's Soto," and then he showed me *Dogen's Soto Approach to Zen*. And I asked, "Is there a Rinzai master in town?" And he said, "I don't know one but

there may be," and then he said, "There is a lecture," so I went. One of my first impressions was that he talked just like the Zen books. I couldn't believe that anyone could actually talk about emptiness as if it were an experience and a real thing. The way Suzuki-roshi stood, the hand gestures, the vibes, everything he communicated, was just extraordinary. I had been to lectures by many famous philosophers and theologians and this was the first time I couldn't find anything to disagree with. So I kept going back and I still couldn't find anything to disagree with.

Claude Dalenberg: I had heard about Zen Center and had met some people from Zen Center—Bob Hense and Bill McNeill in Japan, but I had not been in America since Roshi had come. By the time I returned he had been here nearly three years. I didn't start sitting at Zen Center immediately, but I came to hear some of Roshi's lectures and was very impressed. On coming back I had felt that one's chances of going off to Japan and finding oneself a teacher were not very great. And I was pretty amazed to find Suzuki-roshi here because he seemed to be potentially as good a teacher as anybody I had met, and he spoke English, and he was available. I felt, in many ways, that as far as finding a teacher was concerned, it was no longer necessary to leave and go way off now that Suzuki-roshi was here.

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Wind Bell: When did you sit?

Suzuki-roshi: At the same time, 5:45 in the morning. There were lots of old pews downstairs and we pushed them together and sat (crosslegged) inside. Five or six of us sat this way for a year.

Betty Warren: At first we would sit in Roshi's office before meditation and he would talk to us a little while and then we would go up to the meditation room.



Zazen at Sokoji

At the beginning when we first began to meditate, the pews were in the zendo and there were no tatamis. Two pews were set facing each other along the walls and we would climb up over the ends of the pews and walk along down to our place and then sit down.

Della Goertz: There were no zafus—and nothing round at all.

Betty Warren: Yes, all sorts of odd pillows and there were pews in the middle of the room also, and after zazen we would sit in the pews in the middle for the sutra. He introduced all the rituals very gradually. Later we did the sutra standing up in the front of the pews. I think he didn't know how far he could go with us in the ritual, how much of that we would take. He was afraid he would scare us all off, I think, if he began with the whole thing. Now there's such a group established that has accepted the ritual, why, a new person just has to accept it. When he put the tatamis down, I remember my first reaction was that the pillows were quite hard and the tatamis were hard and I thought, next thing Roshi's going to do is give us each a nice rock and tell us that's what they do in the monastery, but he didn't.

Bill Kwong: Just in the last couple of years has he told us why we don't meditate on four and nine days. In the past, questions like that would never be answered. He'd laugh, or say it was mysterious or secret. Now when we ask him questions he talks quite freely. But at that time he seemed more like the mist.

Betty Warren: We used to expect the unexpected from him and we would sort of take any whim. For instance, there was something about taking the pews downstairs and upstairs. He would decide that all the pews had to be taken out of the middle of the zendo and taken downstairs—and then they would have to be brought back upstairs. Maybe he wanted the room cleared or something, I don't know.

Phillip Wilson: Life always presents a lot of questions and different things, but going to the zendo has always been going to the zendo. And Reverend Suzuki was always willing to lecture to anyone who came. These feelings still remain and have not changed. But the changes that have taken place, have taken place little by little, but in a very persistent and real way. And that real way was like, how do we get the upstairs for a place to meditate from people who are not so interested in meditation? And the way to do it was to carry the benches in and to carry the benches out. And I thought at that time, how can a little old man lift a big bench like that?

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Wind Bell: How long did you plan to stay in America?

Suzuki-roshi: I had no idea, but I said to them, "I'll come back in three years." But actually, in my mind I thought, "I'll stay a pretty long time." I did not return to Japan during those three years and in 1962 I asked my friend to send my wife. She was managing and teaching at two kindergartens, and I wanted my friend to get her out.

Wind Bell: How long did Okusan think she was coming for?

Suzuki-roshi: She promised the kindergarten and my congregation to bring me back in three years. When I decided not to return to Japan even then, I had to resign. Fortunately they wanted my boy to be my successor.

Grahame Petchey: It always appeared to me that he didn't really know whether or not he would stay or go. I know he felt a very strong personal commitment to his students here. I remember his once having said that one of the reasons why he liked being in America was that he had some real students, whereas in Japan when he left he only had one old man sitting with him.

Jean Ross: We felt a little more secure when Okusan came and then when he turned over his Japanese temple to his son. All priests have temples of their own and they're responsible for them. When they're absent they get a neighboring priest or friend to substitute for them. And of course Suzuki-roshi did that for quite some time before his son took over.

Dick Baker: Suzuki-roshi's presence at that time felt like those special warm days in late winter or very early spring that are really nice, and while we have them it's really beautiful. There was the feeling that 'This is a beautiful man here now. Let's make the most of it.' And of course those days turn cold again; we knew that he would go to Japan probably, or there was good chance he might. And that was an important element in that early period, that feeling that Roshi might leave. Every time he came to lecture and talked about Japan, people would start getting nervous. He said in one of the lectures recently, "The older students remember when I first came from Japan I emphasized way-seeking mind." Maybe he didn't emphasize practice as much then because he didn't know if he could make that kind of commitment, so he emphasized our finding our own way-seeking mind to help us find our way even if he weren't there. Maybe, too, because he didn't expect himself to stay, or didn't know whether he'd stay, he just thoroughly enjoyed himself, and didn't have any expectations of us or really of himself, either. There really is a big difference between trying to find a practice where the teacher may only be there for awhile and where the teacher is committed to staying there, and committed to you. Once Roshi decided to stay, his presence obligated us to practice. And a sign of seriousness entered that wasn't there before.

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Wind Bell: How did you spend your time before Okusan came?

Suzuki-roshi: First of all I had plenty of time to be with students, because I was around and because there were not many students. Sometimes we'd go to museums or movies or restaurants. We had a pretty good time. But I didn't want Zen Center to be a kind of social club, so at the same time I tried to refrain from that sort of activity. I wanted us to devote ourselves to zen practice, not to eating or seeing movies.

Wind Bell: When you had only a few students, did you have any plans?

Suzuki-roshi: No, I didn't. But I had an idea to have some school-like system here and to set up some way of exchanging students. And so I asked Headquarters to send some good Zen Master as Bishop. That is why Yamada-roshi came. But he wanted the school in Los Angeles. He tried by himself but it was not successful. Anyway, I thought, if we just practice our way with students, that will be good enough.

Wind Bell: Did you decide to found a school because most of your first students were scholars? Did you think you had to give candy for their minds so they would practice Zen?

Suzuki-roshi: Not candy. Anyway, everything that we are doing is candy. Candy is the most important food actually.

Wind Bell: I don't understand.

Suzuki-roshi: Without any actual activity the first principle in Zen doesn't mean anything. We should help people, and that help is candy.

Jean Ross: The master-disciple relationship didn't come into the picture as strongly as it does now that people want closer contact with him. We had close contact in the early days. There were only eight to twelve of us and on Saturday mornings we'd each bring some kind of food. I used to bring milk and eggs or just the eggs. Bill Kwong was the cook. It was a closer and friendlier atmosphere then than there is now, but that's also because of the size. We didn't eat in the zendo, we ate in the kitchen, which I liked. When we sat at the table with him we could watch every move that he made. Now it's difficult in the zendo for a lot of people to see him, and besides, they're supposed to be looking down. Whereas at the table we could watch him fix tea, watch his facial expressions, gestures, etc. I still wish some of those more intimate relationships could be present.

Dick Baker: There were fewer students and Roshi had more time. He always attended parties and group things. And there was more individual attention and more time to chat or go out with him. There was a more relaxed, less 'zenny' atmosphere in the kitchen, and Roshi had a kind of leisurely attitude, like he just lived here and these people were joining him, rather than he was the head of a teaching thing. There was a nice relaxed feeling about being in someone's living room all the time.

Phillip Wilson: Reverend Suzuki never talked to me for months at first, never tried to fix a cushion underneath me. I sat next to Bill Kwong. He said, "Sometimes people stay." And I said, "I like that a whole lot." And Betty Warren said, "Oh, you've come back." They were more surprised by people staying than people going. They were just doing zazen and if people stayed it was sort of pleasant. It wasn't that people were going, it was just that it was a nice little surprise when they did stay.

Jean Ross: Before I went to Japan I didn't think in terms of the group as sangha and I don't think other people did, really. Bill Kwong might have, and Bill McNeill was thinking of becoming a priest. But there wasn't this group feeling of there being a sangha, not at all. And we all read the latest books on Zen Buddhism but not too much of the technical knowledge. Nowadays people are talking about the sutras, but most of these translations are new. Of course, even in those days Roshi was lecturing, just as he does today. And it was his lectures that we were following.

Dick Baker: To take notes in the beginning, I had to sit in the center of the front row and really concentrate to get the words, and still there were words I would miss every lecture. I can remember for a year I thought he was saying *Arhat*. And he was saying *alert*. "You should be more alert," he would say and I was thinking, "you should be more like an Arhat," more practicing on your own. And after each lecture I'd go in and tell him the words he'd mispronounced, and the English things he'd said wrong. I didn't know if he liked it. I used to say, "Do you mind my doing this? I'm just going to do it anyway."



ANCIENT CEREMONY—In a colorful Chinese ritual more than 1,200 years old, The Rev. Shinzen Suzuki knelt before the altar of the Zen Buddhist Sokoji Temple at 1367 Bush St. and was installed as Priest of the Temple, Bishop Reirin Yamada (right), of Los Angeles, conducted the ceremony, which is believed the first ever held in the United States.

Betty Warren: He went to school. He went to adult education, saying English every day, right after zazen.

Grahame Petchey: I remember his English improving. Some of the early lectures were impossibly difficult to follow, but anyway they were essentially repeating one point—which is the way it always is.

Dick Baker: Do zazen.

Phillip Wilson: I think at that point we were just trying to understand what Roshi was saying. Like I remember the first lecture was so involved and so complicated and so simple that I couldn't understand what he was talking about. I had his accent to deal with. I had the metaphors shifting back from one image to another. And he was smiling all the time and very confident. And then he would say, "Do you understand?" I was so amazed by the beauty and the confusion and perfection of that story that I was very pleased, but I couldn't understand anything about it. And so I thought, here is something to consider. So I went back and back and back and kept trying to understand. And I never understood. So I began to watch everything he did. I said, if I can't understand the story, maybe I can understand by the way he picks up the *kyosaku*. Or the way he picks up his tea cup. So I'm going to watch very very closely. And still I couldn't understand.

Dick Baker: People wanted to sit with Roshi. They kept sitting with Roshi. They liked seeing him once a week, and they liked him being around. We liked to sit, and we sat. And we tried hard with Roshi, but I couldn't perceive during my first year that there was a sense *we* practice Zen. You could practice Zen yourself. It was something people did because it was nice or important or helpful, and they did it with Roshi and liked him. And people did very well. I remember that first

sesshin. I had only been sitting a few weeks and I came and spent a few hours and then I had to go to work. I remember a strange feeling of having to go back to that sesshin which I couldn't sit in anyway. And I had to sit there with my knees up. And I had a compelling feeling of having to be there, so there must have been some practice because it compelled me to come back there. And I certainly found sesshin harder than hell.

Jean Ross: My first sesshin I thought I would never get through and I got awfully mad because I was so uncomfortable. There were several pillows under me and at one point I just got up and threw one across the room. In a few minutes Suzuki-roshi came by quietly and put another one under me.

Grahame Petchey: One of the things I remember about those early sesshins was how inconsistent Roshi was in the timing. Whether a period was forty minutes or one hour didn't make any difference to us but the fact that we didn't know, did. And it seems that some of our zazen periods were twenty minutes, some of the kinhin periods forty minutes. And then again we'd sit for an hour and a half.

Dick Baker: Do you remember the longest one, when he came in and rattled paper and went up and down stairs? Two and a half hours. The only time I've ever seen you move, Grahame, you actually leaned forward, and then leaned back. Your legs didn't move, but you moved your torso a bit.

Grahame Petchey: Well, Roshi had that apartment over the road, and he went across there and didn't come back. I was worried, you know, that he might have forgotten about us, whether I in my position as president should do something about it. And I remember finally, after an hour and a quarter, the relief to hear his footsteps on the stairs. He walked into the zendo and rustled some papers and walked out again.

Virginia Baker: Probably figured, well, they've got a little while to go yet.

Dick Baker: That's right, he's looked at the schedule and said, "Well, it's not time for the period to end yet."

Pauline Petchey: Having gone through three already.

Betty Warren: I think he was trying to have us not be used to a particular time of sitting. We would never know when a period would be over, whether it would be half an hour or an hour and a half.

Jean Ross: I can remember during one sesshin he left us and said he was going to be gone just about twenty minutes. It was Sunday and he was going to lecture to the Japanese group. Well, anyway, it wound up with our having to sit for about an hour and a half. We were all so furious at him because even after he'd gone he'd sent someone to tell us he'd be back in just a few minutes and we'd gotten our hopes up. But he left us there. And we sat. He was very very strict about our not moving. He really growled and caused a bit of trouble if we didn't sit absolutely still. I don't think he's quite as strict on us as he used to be. For instance, he was very very firm that we be in the zendo on time. Once, Bill Kwong was one of two or three persons who were late to the zendo after the work period during a sesshin and Suzuki-roshi told him to get out. If he couldn't be there on time, he shouldn't be there. It was very very hard on Bill. He sat in the office until Roshi would let him back in.

Wind Bell: During sesshins sometimes you would leave and there would be no bells for two hours. The student always wondered about that .

Suzuki-roshi: At that time I put the emphasis on getting rid of the idea of time and space, of where you are, of how long you should sit. That is not zazen. If you sit you should have the confidence to sit forever. Maybe sometimes I forgot, but I didn't feel so bad. I thought, one more hour doesn't matter.

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Wind Bell: How did Zen Center begin?

Suzuki-roshi: By 1961 we had many more students and when they gave me some money I asked them to take care of that money for our expenses—equipment and such. I thought, if I have the money I may spend it in various ways, so it might be better to find someone to take care of it. Then I thought it would be better to have some organization to take care of all the business. We discussed what name would be appropriate and at last decided on Zen Center. This was in 1961. It took one year to get permission from the state.

Jean Ross: In the fall (of 1959) Betty and Della began going regularly in the mornings but I could only come three times a week because I was living in Oakland. I can remember at that time that all of us were quite in awe of this early morning hour because it was something entirely new to us. Those that came that fall were Charles Siegfert and his wife, Bill Kwong, Betty, Della, myself, Bob Hense, and Bill McNeill and his wife and Roger Malek.

Bill McNeill was the spark plug and quite a drawing card. He had a vivid personality, the sort of person who had a kind of following, and was a good administrator. He also wanted to go Japan and subsequently did go, in 1960, and spent a year or more studying in buddhist temples, and also did some teaching English. I don't think there was any one person as leader when Bill left but Betty was as saving a figure as anybody. She was a tremendous help to Suzuki-roshi because he could rely absolutely on her being there every single morning. Bill must have come back the fall of '61, but he didn't have much to do with Zen Center from then on, because he wasn't too happy with his experiences in Japan. He had planned to become a priest and everyone counted on this. When he changed his mind he felt he should leave.

Betty Warren: Maybe we didn't even have an organization before Bill and Bob Hense went to Japan.

Della Goertz: What did we need it for? We sort of individually gave some money once a month, didn't we? Just voluntarily—for Roshi's personal use, we thought. And then later bills came up.

Betty Warren: I guess when we remodelled the zendo we had to have financial recording.

Paul Alexander: When I came, there was no president, there was nothing. What organization we had before we were formally organized was sort of a *kaffee klatch* around the kitchen table after Saturday morning zazen. This was the only chance we had to get together and it was very informal, very homey. And I used to live for these moments because this is where my personal instruction started at Zen

Center. It just happened. Nothing formal. Just sitting around the table in Roshi's presence, which is a great privilege, because you can't be around him for very long and not be awed of his great presence, personality, whatever you want to call it. We talked seriously about what are we, who are we, what are we doing, where are we going, quite frequently. Then Bob Hense returned (the summer of 1961) and sat every day, and he seemed to have the force to project us into some sort of organization. We had a special meeting at which the officers were elected. Bob became president, Betty Warren became vice president, and I became treasurer. The job of secretary got bounced around quite a bit.

Phillip Wilson: I had gotten through reading D.T. Suzuki's works and all the koans and everything like that. So I imagined Zen was supposed to be free. And involved with koans. But I couldn't figure out how it got so legalistic. And it kept running through my head, is this Zen? What have I gotten into? Isn't it another one of those boxes where you've got a business and you've got to wear your little suit? And then I looked up at Reverend Suzuki and he looked perfectly at ease. I thought, aha, at least there's one free man here. But as I look back on it I think it was actually a great act of Bodhisattva activity on Reverend Suzuki's part to let each person express his own nature, and have it fulfill Zen Center's nature at the same time, but my mind wasn't particularly interested in that aspect. I liked the meditation part. Those people who were leading led, and those people who didn't lead didn't say anything. And they were quite content not to say anything because it never occurred to them to feel embarrassed if they didn't, because the whole basis was zazen. So during the very long meetings we'd just sit there half asleep and half awake. And someone would ask him a question and he would give an intelligent comprehensive reply. Like he had heard everything. I like that. How he could hear that and still look like he's asleep.

Della Goertz: Bishop Yamada had a Japanese name for us. But Bob Hense felt that a Japanese name wouldn't attract American students. So Bob thought up Zen Center.

Phillip Wilson: Bill Kwong said that it's Zen and it's a center of activity. And no one could get around the idea.

Paul Alexander: Zen Center became clearly organized under Grahame. He had that ability to pull the loose strings together.

Grahame Petchey: Before I came they had the name of Zen Center and some sort of structure they were trying to get together. Bob Hense had brought in an ex-lawyer who was becoming a minister in Berkeley, and the whole thing seemed to be going on for quite a long time and nothing was really getting anywhere. Then Bob went away for a month or two and I think all the documents were lost for a while. Once they were stolen. I remember. Anyway, we were able to recover some of the papers and we started trying to get incorporated. First we sent off those papers which had already been drawn up to the State and they came right back. So then Paul Alexander, Betty, Jean and I organized ourselves with a lawyer from Sansome Street, drew up a constitution and bylaws, and filed again. And Zen Center was accepted as an incorporated non-profit organization by the State of California somewhere around August 1962.

Dick Baker: It took a year of meetings once a month and more often to decide on something as simple as the stationery. It was sometimes frustrating and rather

wonderful and fun too. Finally we picked a letterhead and then Bob Hense left and the whole thing was held up and wasn't getting through, and the organization still wasn't right for tax exemption. That was a disturbing time for Zen Center. But then Grahame became president and put things together, really, and a sense of order came in. Grahame believed in making an organization something that worked and lasted, and was protected from falling apart or being misused. And he got the legal work done and actually got us a non-profit exemption, which was important for Betty, Jean, and Della who were giving a lot each month. The standard was about three to five dollars a month and the three of them together gave more than half. I did the treasurer's job (from August 1962), though Ginny did most of the work. And at the end of the year we took a little adding machine and—fantastic, we balanced! To the penny. Around \$3700 it was. So putting the money thing in order, having meetings and being in meetings that had a sense of order, getting the letterhead—all of that had some meaning. It was a struggle about the kind of organization we had. The form of the sangha is a kind of moral statement about the Buddhists' own individual development and the basic ways Buddhism affects and is involved in society. So as a meditation group it was important for us to decide whether we should look serious or just square or maybe a little zippy. We sort of compromised with the stationery design—sort of zippy/serious.

Phillip Wilson: My feeling was of Zen Center as a place where students could come to sit. They didn't have to come wanting to belong to the organization and they didn't have to pay any kind of fee. But if they wanted to, they could, and that wanting would come from themselves, and from their situation. So in incorporating the laws I always took the viewpoint of having a free place to do meditation without loading new people down with what they should do before they got started. And then after they got started and did it from their own experience, they would know what to do.

Dick Baker: Also, Grahame introduced a sense of coherence in the practice, of bringing the practice together. He was sort of best student, I guess, as well as president, and gave the real sense of someone who was going to be at Buddhism all his life. He had seen the Buddhist scene in England and knew that some people were Buddhist and were Buddhists all their lives and were able to function in a western Caucasian Society as Buddhists. He didn't say I want to improve myself only; he said, I want to be a good Buddhist, or a good priest. He was able to set high standards for himself that other people perhaps hadn't yet conceived of.

Virginia Baker: He confirmed for others the possibility of taking it seriously.

Phillip Wilson: Grahame used to come every Sunday with a red flower in his buttonhole. He was very English.

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Dick Baker: Certain themes lost out or became covered up or displaced or something. And of the people involved in those themes, some stayed on and some left with the loss of their theme, and there is a kind of resentment there. I don't think this lost history has anything to do with the history being written, but I am sensitive to it and when I think about the history of Zen Center I think about this lost history. And I can't tell you it, obviously, because it is lost for me too. So I can't see how that lost history can be filled in, and for me it should be, it is as important as the history I remember.