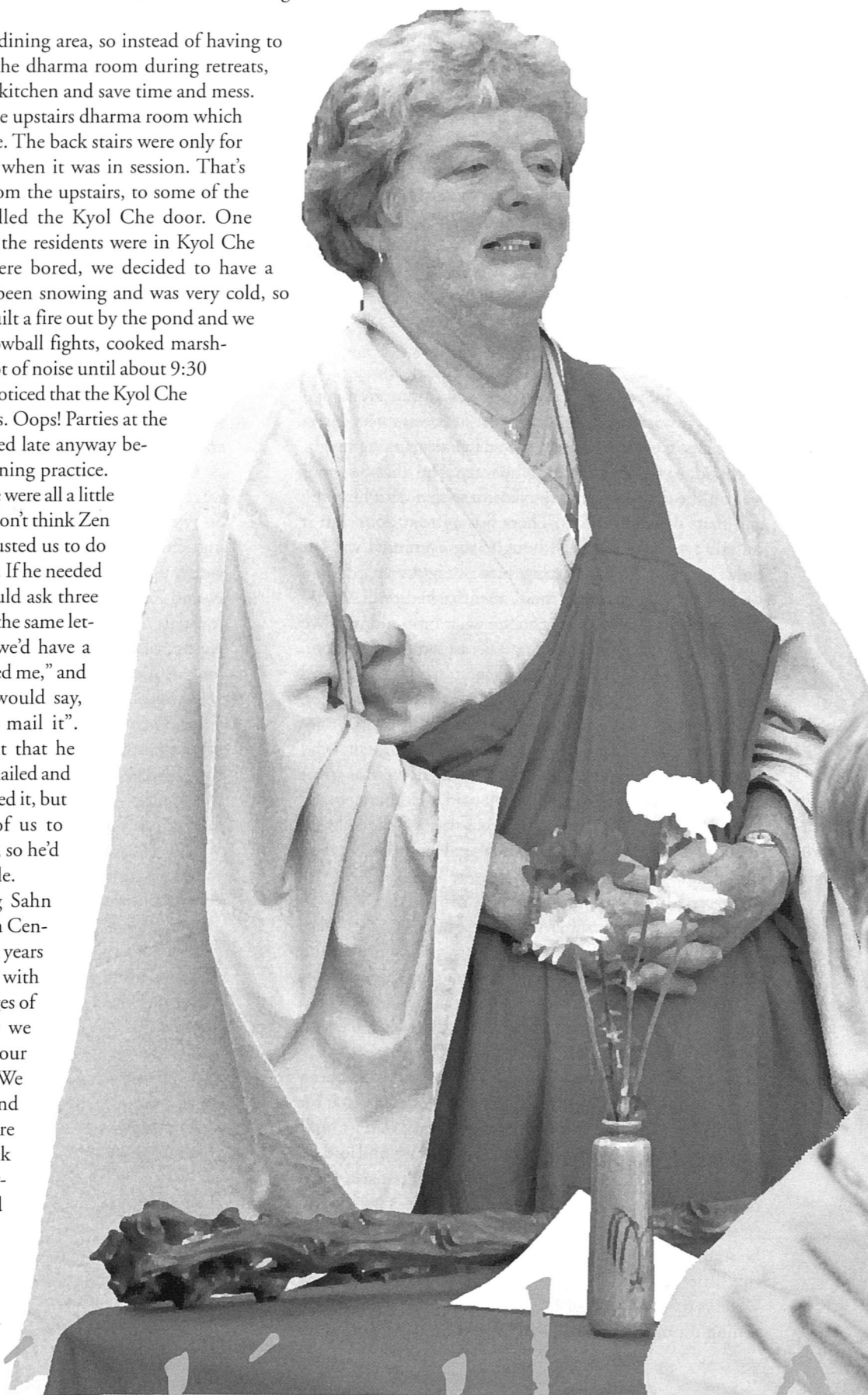


had to go down at about 4:15 a.m. and start the furnace for the main dharma room, so that room would be warm enough to practice in.

Next we built the dining area, so instead of having to cart all the meals to the dharma room during retreats, we could eat near the kitchen and save time and mess. Eventually we built the upstairs dharma room which was used for Kyol Che. The back stairs were only for the Kyol Che people when it was in session. That's why the back door from the upstairs, to some of the older students, is called the Kyol Che door. One winter when most of the residents were in Kyol Che and the rest of us were bored, we decided to have a skating party. It had been snowing and was very cold, so one of the residents built a fire out by the pond and we went skating, had snowball fights, cooked marshmallows and made a lot of noise until about 9:30 p.m., when someone noticed that the Kyol Che retreatants could see us. Oops! Parties at the Zen Center never lasted late anyway because of the early morning practice.

In the early days, we were all a little bit left-over hippies. I don't think Zen Master Seung Sahn trusted us to do anything meticulously. If he needed a letter mailed, he would ask three or four people to mail the same letter. Then, of course, we'd have a discussion, "but he asked me," and then somebody else would say, "no, he asked me to mail it". Finally we figured out that he just wanted the letter mailed and he didn't care who mailed it, but he didn't trust any of us to actually mail the letter, so he'd ask three or four people.

Zen Master Seung Sahn used to refer to the Zen Center as only being five years old, then a "teenager" with all the attitude and stages of growing up. So, now we have made it through our twenties and are thirty. We get the letters mailed and do even more, so we are maturing nicely. Thank you very much to everyone for your efforts and your practice.



STICKING AROUND

Michael Konstan

Today we are celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of Providence Zen Center and the Kwan Um School of Zen. Going back thirty years, there was not much Zen practice in Providence. Jacob Perl—now Zen Master Wu Bong—and I were part of a small group that met at Manning Chapel at Brown University for daily meditation practice.

Then we heard about a Buddhist monk living out on Doyle Avenue. This was Zen Master Seung Sahn. He was new in the country and he didn't speak English, only Korean and Japanese. One evening I decided to visit. I went along with Brown's Buddhism professor, Leo Pruden. Besides speaking Japanese, Professor Pruden also understood proper etiquette. "When you visit a monk," he said, "you must bring a gift." So he bought a box of

Japanese bean-jelly candy. We didn't know at the time that Zen Master Seung Sahn was a diabetic. Zen Master Seung Sahn graciously accepted the candy and then served it to us with tea.

We visited for about an hour, with Professor Pruden translating. Zen Master Seung Sahn gave his cookie dough talk that night. I'm sure you've heard it. It goes, "All things are cut out of the same

universal substance, like cookies all cut out of the same dough."

Anyway, the very next morning I began practicing with Zen Master Seung Sahn. By the end of the second week, there were already three or four of us sitting regularly at Doyle Avenue. That's when we began chanting practice. Zen Master Seung Sahn brought out chanting books, all in Chinese characters, no English. He pointed to a character, "This 'Shim,' this 'Myo,' 'Jang.'" We wrote the sound in pencil under each pictogram. "Ku,' 'Te,' 'Daranhe.'" That became our first chanting book.

Just like today, chanting and sitting practice were done very early in the morning. Maybe 5 o'clock. Then Zen Master Seung Sahn had to get ready to leave for work and we had to go to school. As you probably know, in those days Zen Master Seung Sahn didn't have a big donor base. Instead, he supported himself by repairing washing machines at a local laundromat. Before leaving for work he made himself breakfast and he invited us to join him. Breakfast was potato-miso soup. Very tasty! I don't know if it was intentional or not, but, if you feed college students, they will stick around.

Within a couple of months the two-bedroom apartment at Doyle Avenue was completely full. Other people began renting apartments nearby so they could come to practice every day.

And today, thirty years later, the Kwan Um School of Zen has grown to over eighty temples in twenty-five countries worldwide. It's truly beyond the wildest dreams of anyone in those early days at Doyle Avenue. Of course it didn't happen without a lot of work.

Special congratulations must go to those students who have devoted fifteen, twenty, even thirty years of their lives to building our school. Thank you.

And, finally, for those of you who are new to Buddhist practice, I would like to extend a special welcome. You are the future of our school. Maybe today marks your first meeting with a Zen Master. In our school we have a saying, "Only try, try, try for ten thousand years." So I invite you to try this practice. And after just thirty years you, too, may find that the results are beyond your wildest dreams.

Thank you and again congratulations to the Kwan Um School of Zen on thirty years of Buddhist teaching.

