



Prairie Wind

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PILGRIMAGE

In this issue of *Prairie Wind*, we are re-printing an article by Rev. Kyoki Roberts about a walking pilgrimage she took through Southeastern Nebraska in 1998. At that time, Kyoki was living and training at Heartland Temple in Omaha, where I am abbot. A few months later, she left Omaha, settled near her childhood home just north of Pittsburgh, PA, and founded Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple, where she is currently Head Priest.

When Kyoki was leaving to begin her pilgrimage, she asked me to drive her out of town to the West, and I left her on a gravel road just beyond the Platte River. As she walked away heading South, dressed in her robes, her dog bounding down the road before her, I thought of my experiences begging in Japan, following monks similarly dressed, and of monks and nuns of ages past who went on similar pilgrimages in China and Japan. I also thought of the Buddha, who wandered Northern India for over fifty years after he awakened.

I was deeply moved by the sight of Kyoki following this ancient path. It's tough enough to travel like that in a place where people at least know what you are by how you're dressed. I couldn't imagine what it would be like here in Eastern Nebraska. I was moved by the strength in her stride and by her strong spirit.

Shortly after I returned to Omaha, I came across this koan in *The Book of Serenity*: Dizang asked Fayan, "Where are you going?" Fayan said, "Around on pilgrimage." Dizang said, "What is the purpose of pilgrimage?" Fayan said, "I don't know." Dizang replied, "Not knowing is nearest."

Fayan's "I don't know" is not simple stupidity. His "not knowing" reflects the clear and spacious mind that abides nowhere. He is ready for anything that comes up and ready to travel in any direction that demands attention. Not having any preconceived ideas about what you're supposed to find or experience and letting the world unfold before you, as it is, is what true spiritual practice is all about.

Dizang approves of Fayan's "I don't know" by saying "Not knowing is nearest." Nearest to what? To the truth of our life? To awakening? Perhaps if we manifest "I don't know" mind as we travel on our own life's pilgrimage, we will understand, and if we step into each moment of our lives with open, "not knowing" mind, we will come closest to the truth of our existence.



Kyoki On Pilgrimage

**Nonin Chowaney, Abbot
Heartland Temple**



Don't Know — Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

NOT A TRACE

by Kyoki Roberts

It's over ninety degrees and it's not even 9 a. m. I am walking south on Road 14 in Saunders County, Nebraska with a priest bag over one shoulder that contains a poncho, a change of underwear, toiletries, my journal, and a water bottle. A water bag is slung over my other shoulder. I'm wearing my robes, a straw hat, and sandals and am carrying a walking stick in my right hand. My dog, an Australian Shepherd named Li'l Red, bounds down the road before me. I have just begun a ten-day walking pilgrimage through Southeastern Nebraska.

How did I get here? It goes back two years, to when my old friend from farming days, Judy Dye, and I drove down to the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in Northern Oklahoma. After spending the night sleeping out on the land and sitting zazen in the morning, Judy turned to me and said, "Pick me up in a couple of hours." She then started walking north.

I picked her up, and then I and Li'l Red walked while Judy rested. She picked us up later. We spent the next ten days leapfrogging north through the Flint Hills and eventually walked the breath of Kansas, all the way to the Nebraska border, taking the back roads and camping in the grassy fields wherever dark found us. We gloried in the smell of the grass, the sound of the wind through the brush, the scream of the hawk, the beauty of the sunsets, and the bright nearness of the stars. In the morning, we sat zazen together, and then we each did our own morning service -- hers Christian and mine Buddhist. We had found a way to be on the land, close to nature, without owning or disturbing it, a way we had been looking for since we both quit farming years ago.

After returning to my daily life as a Zen priest, I often found myself reflecting on our walk. I asked myself, "How can I deepen this connection with the land I had re-discovered after missing it for so many years?" I felt that the car, the café meals,

and even Judy's companionship had kept me from a complete experience of oneness with the land. My Buddhist training was leading me to trust myself and my own experience more. An inner voice was saying, "Just go and be on the land and see what happens." But, I still felt that I had to plan what I was to take based on what I had learned from my trip with Judy. If I were to take Red along, then I also had to be responsible for his welfare. Caught between the need to plan and the need to just allow myself to be with the land freely, I needed to find some middle way. I decided to take only the barest of necessities. I'd walk the whole way and not accept rides. I decided to beg for food and water as I went, but I would take some cash just in case!

I had learned to beg in Japan, following a centuries old tradition. Shopkeepers and farmers came out to give money and food when they heard us ringing our bells and chanting. When traveling with Judy, I had tried begging the same way in a small Kansas town only to have the local police officer stop me to ask what I was doing. He said that I had lit up the switchboard down at the office! People had given me money when I explained what I was doing, but it seemed wrong to alarm a small community the way I had. Was there a different way? I continued to ponder this right up to the day I left.

That day finally comes this year in mid-July and the cloudless sky promises a true cooker. It begins as usual at the Omaha temple with zazen, morning service, house cleaning, and breakfast. I then fill my water bottles, change into my traveling robes, and make three prostrations to Buddha, thus formally leaving the temple. Nonin will give Red and me a ride to the far western edge of Omaha, where we would

Nebraska Zen Center Officers

Ryoshin Joe Marshall	President
Koshin Bob Schenck	Vice-President
Noshin Marcia Prideaux	Secretary
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Kanho Doug Dittman	Board Member
Hal Holoun	Board Member

Rev. Nonin Chowaney, OPW Abbot



Nebraska Zen Center is a Soto Zen Buddhist Temple established for Zen practice. The center follows the tradition established in Japan by Zen Master Eihei Dogen in the 13th century and transmitted in this century by two Masters, Rev. Shunryu Suzuki, founder of San Francisco Zen Center and author of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* and Rev. Dainin Katagiri, who assisted Rev. Suzuki in San Francisco and later founded Minnesota Zen Meditation Center in Minneapolis. Rev. Katagiri was instrumental in establishing Nebraska Zen Center in 1975.

Rev. Nonin Chowaney, an American Zen Master, is NZC's Head Priest and Teacher. He trained with Rev. Katagiri and was ordained by him. Rev. Chowaney also trained at Tassajara Zen Monastery in California and in Japan at Zuio-ji and Shogo-ji monasteries. He received formal Dharma Transmission from Rev. Katagiri and has been certified to teach by him and by the Soto Zen Church in Japan.

begin our pilgrimage.

Right up to the minute we pile into the car, I haven't really decided where I'm ultimately going. When there is no destination, direction is not very important,

NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER — SANGHA NOTES

Sangha members **Vicki Grunwald** and **Hal Holoun** completed **Lay Initiation** at Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple in March. Vicki's dharma name is **Zenryu** (Zen Dragon), and Hal's is **Toze** (Hit the mark as-it-is). **Congratulations to you both!**

The annual **Prairie Wind Retreat** in June will be held at **Deep Spring Temple** near Pittsburgh again this year. After that, **Nonin** is taking a **mini-sabbatical** for six weeks, so he'll be gone from **June 1st till August 15th**. We will, however, be maintaining our regular schedule (printed on page 12) with two exceptions: **there will be no early (6:00 am) sitting on Saturday and Sundays**. Sunday dharma talks during June will be given by newer students on the dates specified in the box on the right. During July and early August dharma talks will be given by senior students.



During the Lay Initiation Ceremony

Comings and Goings: **Randy and Lacey Putnam** are moving to Albany, NY soon to be nearer Lacey's family. **Koken Greg and Sarah Petitto** are moving to Anchorage, Alaska (!) in July. Sarah has accepted a post-doctoral position in Chemistry there at the University of Alaska. **Zenshin Keith Hale** will begin a one-year residency at Deep Spring Temple near Pittsburgh starting June 1st. So, Randy, Koken Greg, and Zenshin Keith have all left our Board of Directors. **We thank them all for their service to Heartland Temple and wish them and all of the above safe passage and all the best in their new endeavors!**

Gary Carlson has left the Board of Directors, and **Kanho Doug Dittman** will be replacing him. **Thanks to Gary for serving and to Kanho Doug for coming aboard!**

Many thanks to **Dallas Marshall** for the Lay Initiation Photos and to **Zenshin Keith Hale** for the new bench in the sitting area adjacent to the Buddha Hall.

SESSHIN

There will be no sesshins at NZC this Summer. Our usual **Two-day Sesshin** in June will be held at **Deep Spring Temple**, near Pittsburgh, on **June 4th and 5th**, as part of our annual month-long **Prairie Wind Retreat**. **Contact Deep Spring Temple for details.** Their addresses and phone number are at the **bottom of page 5**.

JUNE STUDENT TALKS

On **June 5th**, we'll have **World Peace Ceremony** and monthly **Group Discussion**. During the rest of June, Sunday morning dharma talks will be given by **students** on the **12th, 19th, and 26th**. Students will focus on what brought them to Zen practice, what their joys and difficulties have been, and what has kept them at it over time.

OTHER SUMMER EVENTS

Jun	22	Ryaku Fusatsu
Jul	3	World Peace Ceremony
		Group Discussion
	20	Ryaku Fusatsu
Aug	7	World Peace Ceremony
		Group Discussion
	17	Ryaku Fusatsu

ZEN CENTER OF PITTSBURGH – SANGHA NOTES

ZCP FALL EVENTS

JUNE

- 1-30 — OPW Practice Period, Opening Ceremony on the 1st
- 3-5 — Two-day Sesshin***
7pm Fri-5pm Sun
- 5 — World Peace Ceremony
- 18 — Zen in Chinese Poetry Workshop***
- 30 — Practice Period Closing Ceremony

JULY

- 1-4 — ZCP closed
- 16 — One-day Sitting***
- 19 — Ryaku Fusatsu*
- 20 — Ikko Narasaki's Memorial Day
- 21 — Sitting at Mt. Alvernia**

AUGUST

- 7 — World Peace Ceremony
- 16 — Ryaku Fusatsu*
- 18 — Sitting at Mt. Alvernia**

*after evening zazen

**There is no evening sitting at ZCP on the nights we sit at Mt. Alvernia Monastery

***Please Register for this event

Telethon a huge success! We raised **\$8500** towards building a handicap accessible bathroom by calling everyone who had ever been on our mailing list. We not only raised enough money to begin building this Summer but also caught up on the latest news from all our friends! **Many thanks** to all who worked on the project and to all who contributed.

Deep thanks to **Huang Xiang** and his wife, **Shang Ling**, for the beautiful **Heart Sutra calligraphy** now hanging at the entry to our zendo. **Thanks also** to **Mimi Jong** for donating the wood that that sutra is written on and to **Don Brainard and John Haught** of the Masonic Village woodshop for constructing the wall-hanging. **We also thank John Ott** for his work in the garden and for leading the clean-up crew and **Debra, Tom, Jane**, and all the others for organizing **Community Day**. **Thanks also** to **Tom Persinger** for his continuing work on the website and database and for his picture now hanging at the top of the stairs. **Our thanks also** to **Jay and Leslie** for work on our database.

Special thanks to **Rev. Zenkei Blanche Hartman** for visiting and giving a dharma talk at Deep Spring.



ZCP DAILY SCHEDULE

AM

Tuesday

7:00 a.m. - Zazen at the Mattress Factory

Wednesday - Saturday

5:30 a.m. - Zazen

6:45 a.m. - Morning Service

PM

Tuesday - Saturday

6:00 - 7:15 p.m. - Zazen

Sunday

10:00 a.m. - Zazen

10:40 a.m. - Work Practice

11:15 a.m. - Service/Dharma Talk

12:30 p.m. - Lunch

Closed Mondays

Comings and Goings: Groups from **St. Paul United Methodist Church** and **Pittsburgh Theological Seminary** visited ZCP this Spring. Sangha member **Myo-en Margaret Coghlan** participated in the North Hills Interfaith Service and spoke at Carlow College. **Kyoki** traveled to Portland, OR this past April to attend a Board Meeting of the **Soto Zen Buddhist Association** and then went to **Shasta Abbey** for a visit and to practice with the monks. **Kyoki** also traveled to Omaha to lead a **Communication Workshop** at Heartland Temple and to Mt. Equity Zendo with **Myo-en Margaret** to participate in **Rev. Dai-en Bennage's** Mountain Seat Ceremony.

Zenshin Keith Hale will begin a one-year residency at Deep Spring Temple on June 1st.

Note: **Nonin** will be in residence not only for this year's Practice Period but also during July and part of August while he takes a much needed break from his regular duties at Heartland Temple in Omaha.

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but an old farming friend had offered a bed when she had heard about the journey, and in the end I decided that it made sense to have a shakedown day with a familiar face at the end of it. Interestingly, the logical starting point for the day's walk is not two miles from my old farm. I am beginning the walk in familiar territory.

I know this land — mostly corn and soybeans with an occasional alfalfa field. It is especially well-watered this year and the crops, despite the heat, are doing well. For the most part, the corn has already pollinated, well ahead of schedule, and even some of the beans are flowering. The whole first day I see only one farmer in his fields, doing a late weed-spraying. Walking past familiar farmhouses, I recall the names of some of my old neighbors, mostly German in this area. About noon, I pass a man laying irrigation pipe on University of Nebraska land, and he becomes the recipient of my first attempt at begging. "I'm a Buddhist nun doing a ten-day retreat walking through eastern Nebraska. I'm running short of water and wondered if you had any extra to spare," I say. There, I did it. Simple. Direct. "Sure, I can always get more," he replies, and for the next ten days, not once am I denied anything for which I ask. Between begging and the ample number of streams, Red and I are taken care of. After filling up with water, we stop and share a snack that I had brought along. (I really don't *totally* trust the universe to provide!)

There is a gentle ache in my shoulders and hips. The heat has forced me to remove my outer robe. After eating, I soak the light cotton towel I wear wrapped on my head under my hat with water, a practice I will continue for the rest of the trip. Red, too, is starting to suffer from the heat, and the once numerous streams have diminished. To protect his paws, I put on little rawhide booties, the kind sled-dogs wear, but I worry that they may be the cause of damage themselves and monitor his condition carefully. We stop more frequently now so he can rest, and I share my water with him. Risking running out, I sprinkle some over his head and

shoulders. A State road truck stops, and the driver asks if she can give us a ride. I accept for Red, knowing that the next stream is still two miles away. It must be over 100 degrees. Red spends a half-hour in the stream as I wait gratefully in the shade. A guy from a road crew working nearby offers a cupcake, and I receive my first food offering without even having asked! We then continue, but even slower now. It takes us four hours to go the next four miles. Fearing for his safety, I stop and call my friend to come get us to save Red the last two miles. It's been a long day.

That night, it becomes obvious that Red will not be able to continue. His feet are so sore that he stands only when called. I'm sick that I caused this suffering for my loyal companion. I call Nonin and ask him to come pick him up in the morning. I'll go on alone. During the night, I also decide to pick a direction in which to head. Why, I'm not sure, but there's fear of something behind my decision. It'll restrict the freedom I've been seeking, but I feel more comfortable after I decide to go south, leave Lincoln to my right, and continue to Wymore / Blue Springs, near the Kansas border, where my old friend Judy is now a Methodist pastor.

In the morning, my friend Geneveva, with whom I stayed last night, walks me to the end of the first road. I turn and head South, understanding the ramifications of the decision I've made if not *totally* the cause. I sense that the pilgrimage is different, because there is a direction to it. No longer will I take a road because it looks interesting but because it will take me where I now want to go. I have imposed a set of directions on the walk and the possibilities have been infinitely diminished.

It's also different without Red. The loyal companionship that only a dog can provide is gone. But so is the constant concern for his safety — I no longer have to monitor his reaction to the heat, watch him in traffic, worry about his

LINCOLN ZEN GROUP

A group affiliated with NZC meets in Lincoln weekly on **Thursday evenings at 7:00 pm** at the **Unitarian Universalist Church, 6300 A St.** For further information, e-mail or call **Seishin Larry Pelter** at **lpelter@alltel.net** (402-483-1755) or **Koken Greg Petitto** at **gppetto@hotmail.com** (402-477-0558). Zazen Instruction is available for newcomers if arranged in advance.

WHITE LOTUS SANGHA

The **White Lotus Sangha**, a group affiliated with NZC, meets in three Nebraska prisons, **Nebraska State Penitentiary** and **Lincoln Correctional Center** in Lincoln and **Tecumseh State Correctional Institute** in Tecumseh. For further information, call **(402) 551-9035**, e-mail **heartland@prairiewindzen.org**, or write **Nebraska Zen Center, 3625 Lafayette Ave., Omaha, NE, 68131-1363**.

feet, and make sure he's getting enough water. Also gone are the food, water, rope, and bowl that I was carrying for him, causing a noticeable difference in the weight of my priest bag. I'm freer, and I'm walking significantly faster, with fewer stops. Still, I miss him and worry whether he will be okay. My increased freedom also allows me to take more notice of the area around me. I stop and draw a picture of a lark on a dead branch, and appreciate a garden of butterflies fluttering around me as they drink from the rain puddles left the night before. The rain brought no relief from the heat, however; it only added more humidity to the air. The next four days will break a Nebraska heat-index record that's

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lasted for twenty years. Despite carrying nearly a gallon of water, I find myself stopping for refills three or four times a day. Begging for water in this heat is no longer difficult!

As evening comes, I find myself in the outer suburbs of Lincoln. Corn and beans have given way to houses on five acres, each with a horse. My discomfort level rises with the increase in traffic and the decrease in acceptable places to spend the night. Continuing farther will only mean more people, and my right knee aches from the long day. A deputy sheriff turns onto the road I'm walking, and I know that it's because of me. She stops and asks if I'm all right. It seems that the locals are worried about me being out in this heat. "I'm fine, thank you," I say, but I give no explanation of what I'm doing. Why? What is the fear? I continue on my way after she leaves.

I'm heading into Waverly. I lean heavily on my walking stick, trying to ease the throbbing in my right knee. There is no where to stop for the night, the mosquitoes are horrendous, and my stomach is growling, but the sunset is spectacular. Streaks of pink and orange stretch all the way to the eastern horizon. I rest the knee, sip water, and watch for a while. Then I hurry on. My only option is to get through town and hope that I can find a field on the other side. Two cars of teenagers try to run me off the road, and then, skidding on the gravel, they almost go off the road themselves. Nervously, I hurry on, looking over my shoulder to see if they are following. They're not. It's near dark as I cross Interstate 80 and again return to a friendly landscape of corn and beans.

A mile farther, I slip into the grassy corner of a cornfield and try to sleep. I stretch my poncho out on the ground, pull a small mosquito net over my head, cover myself with my outer robe, and wrap the poncho around me. It is miserably hot, but the poncho offers protection from insects and dew. Even though I am exhausted, it is difficult to sleep. Trucks moan constantly on the Interstate, a diesel

engine turning an irrigation rig roars nearby, and during the night my poncho and robe loosen and the mosquitoes attack. Also, I have developed a case of diarrhea. Why, I don't know. I'm carrying a high-tech water bottle with a built-in filter, so it can't be the water. Maybe something I ate?

It's still dark when I rise, pack my few belongings by feel, and sling my water bag across one shoulder and my priest bag across the other. I use my walking stick to feel myself back out of the cornfield. It's my third day on the road.

Despite the lack of rest, the cool morning puts a spring in my stride. Cows greet me, mooing from dark pastures, and then, tails up, run off out of sight. Before sunrise, I walk more than five miles. As the sun comes up, the views are spectacular; I can see miles and miles to the horizon. It's like looking out over an ocean you can walk across. Burnt orange wheat fields, recently harvested, break the pattern established by the greens of corn and beans. Sunrise over the prairie is a long drawn out process, infinitely varied, and almost always so striking that I find myself continually stopping to watch. In July, the sun still rises north of due east, behind me as I walk, and I turn again and again to see the moment by moment changes. My pace slows to meet the sun's call. To experience things like this is why I'm here after all, and I am

SANGHA MEMBERSHIP AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER ZEN CENTER OF PITTSBURGH

Membership

While no one needs to formally join either temple to share in our practices, we invite you to become a member of either Nebraska Zen Center or Zen Center of Pittsburgh. Members are people who feel that Zen Buddhism is an important part of their lives and who wish to express that feeling by joining a community of practitioners.

If you are interested in becoming a member, please speak with the appropriate person at either temple after Sunday services.

Financial Support

Buddhist communities have always relied on the generosity of their supporters. For income, we depend on those who believe in the good of what we do and wish to nourish it.

No one is refused temple membership due to an inability to pay. We do, however, encourage members to commit to our financial support through monthly pledges. We also encourage members to exhibit this support through participation in work projects.

The amount of your pledge is your personal decision. We ask you to support the temple at a level appropriate to your means. For those who participate regularly, we suggest a monthly pledge that reflects one hour of your earnings per week, or four hours per month. Because we are non-profit religious corporations, all donations are tax

treated to a perfect sunrise.

It doesn't take long, however, before heat and hunger become major concerns. I wrap my arms in cloths to prevent burning and continually soak my head with water. There are no convenience stores at which to stop for food. A woman from whom I received water a few miles back drives up, stops, and gives me some sunflower seeds. I

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suck the hulls for the salt. The tiny seeds do nothing to alleviate my hunger. From a nearby field, I glean several handfuls of wheat missed by the combine, and I'm reminded of my childhood in Pennsylvania. I would go to the fields with Bill Devlin, who farmed my parents' land when I was growing up. We'd walk out and test the wheat to see if it was ready for harvest by rolling the heads between our hands, blowing the chaff away, and chewing on the kernels. Today, I eat several handfuls, and it is surprisingly filling.

Several hours later, the sustenance I gained from the wheat is gone. I need food, and I need salt. I also need water, so, I stop at a dog kennel and knock at the door of the house. A young woman opens it, and I make my usual request for water. "Sure," she says, "Use that," pointing to a hose lying nearby. Not until I'm closing the top of my water carrier do I blurt out: "Can you spare some food?" "Why sure," she says. "Do you want a lunchmeat or tuna fish sandwich?" Normally, I am a vegetarian, but I accept what has been offered, and we go inside. She makes me a tuna fish sandwich.

I had done it. I asked. No problem. Why had I been so reluctant to ask for food? What was the difference between asking for water and asking for food? We sit at the kitchen counter as I eat the sandwich and also a cucumber and carrot, talking about the hunting dogs her husband trains and the schools her children attend. She doesn't ask about Buddhism or the reasons for my walk. Interestingly, almost no one the entire trip would ask me about these things. I'm a little anxious, for this is my first time inside someone's home, so I hurry through the meal and am soon on my way again. Before I leave, however, my hostess tells me about some State land a few miles down the road where camping is allowed.

That evening, I make my way to Wagon Train State Recreation Area. I swim in the lake and use the opportunity to wash some of my clothes. Using the last bit of light, I wander up a service road to the top

of the hill overlooking the lake. I hang my clothes to dry, gather freshly mown grass, and make a bed on an old picnic table. The stars seem close enough to touch, and a breeze keeps the mosquitoes away. My stomach is full, and I'm asleep in minutes.

The next day, things are a little different. The heat is still extreme. Mosquito and chigger bites cover my body. My knee still seizes up on me throughout the day. But walking has become more like a long sesshin. There, you just sit, one period after the next, no matter what. Here, I put one foot after another and just walk, no matter what. Also, things are different because I feel an increasing lightness about begging. It becomes easy. A woman working in her garden stops and gives me crackers and bread when I ask for something to eat; a pastor in a rural church invites me in for a cup of coffee when I ask to use the phone to call home to let Nonin know how things are going; a twelve-year-old boy answers my knock at a farmhouse door with a freshly cooked hamburger in his hand, and when I ask for food, gives me the burger without a moment's hesitation as he invites me in. "Can you eat another one?" he asks. His mother joins us, and we sit at the kitchen table as the boy's older sister heats baked beans for me in the microwave and talk about the upcoming Gage County Fair. I comment to the mother about her son's generosity. She tells me that their church group has just returned from Kansas City where they served food at a homeless shelter. "He has much to teach me about giving," I remark. I stay for about a half-hour, talking about their projects for the fair, feeling no anxiety whatever being with these kind people in their home. After leaving, I turn to look back at the house and see them returning to work in the hayfield.

The last two miles to Blue Springs are a killer. The water in my carrier burns to the touch and is of no value for cooling. It is so hot even the asphalt road is softening. Along the river bottom, trees prevent even the slightest breeze. My

ankles swell. I can only walk a little way before I have to stop and rest, gasping for air. Even so, when offered a ride, I refuse and continue, wanting to walk the whole way. Two hours later, I arrive at Judy's, but she's not home. The door is locked. I go to the back yard and use her garden hose to cool and soak my feet in a puddle I make in the grass. I then stretch out on her picnic table and fall asleep. About an hour later, Judy wakes me. We go inside, and I soak in the tub while she fixes dinner. We talk for a while after eating, and then, exhausted, I go to bed.

In the morning, we sit zazen, and Judy shares the reading from which she will derive her sermon for this Sunday. It's about learning to pray. Christ teaches the Lord's prayer to his disciples. He goes on to say, "Ask and you will receive." Seems apropos for my current situation! I comment on how often I didn't even need to ask out loud. I was thinking "hunger" and the guy working on the road crew gave me a cupcake! Somehow the asking-offering-receiving are so interconnected that they can't be separated out, like when the boy gave me the hamburger. It was almost simultaneous. Can the heart/mind simply arouse the idea of hunger and the heart/mind respond with food? Probably. But before it has the opportunity, we try to control the situation, even though we know in our hearts that life can not be controlled, and thus give rise to anxiety. "Maybe if I just ask for things, I'll be given them," I say, and add jokingly, "How about a pork chop and some fresh sweet corn? That'd be nice." I resolve to trust more, and leave Judy's with a restored body and heart.

I now definitely have no specific destination. No longer anxious about begging and much cooler (the heat wave has ended), I feel free, and I walk away with a spring in my step. I choose to head west, for no particular reason, except that going west has always meant freedom to me in the form of big skies, long views, and fewer people. I grew up on stories about the West and left Pennsylvania for Wyoming and Colorado when I was seventeen. Nebraska is about as far East as I want to be.

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SERENE COMPUTER MESSAGES

We've all seen the following on our computer screens: "Your computer has performed an illegal operation and will be shut down!" Wouldn't messages like the following be much nicer to receive?

The website you seek cannot be located, but countless more exist.

Program aborting. Close all the you have worked on. You ask far too much.

Yesterday it worked. Today it is not working. Windows is like that.

Your file was so big. It might be be very useful. But now it is gone.

Stay the patient course. Of little worth is your ire. The network is down.

You step in the stream, but the water has moved on. This page is not here.

Out of memory. We wish to hold the whole sky, but we never will.

Having been erased, the document you're seeking must now be re-typed.

Serious error. All shortcuts have disappeared.



Calligraphy For Sale



Suchness

Nonin's calligraphy can be purchased through our website, at www.prairiewindzen.org. Click on **Nebraska Zen Center** and go to **Nonin's calligraphy pages**.

There are **over fifty items for sale**, one and two-character pieces, longer phrases, and specialty items. All are **signed and stamped originals** and are written on high-quality paper, either Canson watercolor paper, Rives BFK, or archival matboard.

We sell and ship the calligraphy unframed. **Each piece can be mounted and framed using traditional methods** by any good framer.

All profits from website calligraphy sales go directly to Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple.

From the editor:

We **always** need material. Send us articles, drawings, poems, photos, cartoons, letters, etc. The deadline for publication in our **Fall** issue is **August 1st**.

Websites for **Nebraska Zen Center** and **Zen Center of Pittsburgh** are at: www.prairiewindzen.org

Nebraska Zen Center's e-mail address is: heartland@prairiewindzen.org

Zen Center of Pittsburgh's e-mail address is: kyoki@prairiewindzen.org

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In the afternoon, I pause by a hay field, where a farmer is moving stacks of alfalfa. He stops, and we talk of farming. He then begins to share his main concerns with me: his son's divorce and an impending lawsuit filed by his daughter-in-law are deeply troubling him. The farm equipment is being appraised today, and he is worried about how the settlement might effect the father and son farming operation. He is also sad because the acrimony surrounding the divorce has prevented him from seeing much of his grandchildren. I feel a deep concern for him; he seems like a such a nice man. His son then drives up, and I am included in a discussion about the settlement, which ends with his complaining about being unable to take his children to supper at the County Fair tonight. The father then asks me what I'm doing for supper tonight. I reply that people have been offering me food, and he takes out his wallet and gives me a ten-dollar bill, saying, "Buy yourself dinner at the café in Diller."

I enjoy a large pizza at the café, and later, on a full stomach, spend the night in a public wildlife area east of Fairbury. During the night, sleeping in the deep grass, I am awakened by rough snorts and sit up with a start. Two deer have stumbled upon me and are probably wondering what this strange-looking bundle is! They walk back a few steps, snort again, stomp their feet, and then turn and bound away. I chuckle and go back to sleep.

The next morning, west of Fairbury, I head South across Rose Creek basin for no other reason than it looks like a nice road. Cultivated fields give way to native pastures, and as I top a ridge, I open a gate and walk out into one. In all directions, the grasses, lush from this Summer's abundant rains, spread in front of me. How many miles can one see (twenty? thirty?) before the horizon and sky become indistinguishable? Here I sit, and watch the clouds and sun play across the sky and the breeze creates ever-changing patterns in the grass. Cows graze quietly in the distance, and a goldfinch flits between two trees. There is

not a single human-made noise to be heard. I am at peace.

The roads in this area follow the whimsy of the land and no longer are laid out in the Jeffersonian grid system that covers so much of the Prairie states. I notice that I've been forced far enough south that I must now be in Kansas. Houses are quite a ways apart here, and I search eagerly for one at which to replenish my water. At the same time, I think about my increasing hunger and think of how nice it would be to sit down with a family at a big mid-western supper. The first place I stop, the farmer is busy in the shop replacing the sickles on his windrower. He offers water, and I fill my bottle and bag. I don't ask about food, and he doesn't offer.

Two miles down the road, a pickup drives by and turns into a farmyard. I approach the yard and am greeted at the foot of the drive by a man who asks if I need anything. I give him my little spiel and he laughs, saying that he's here for the same thing, for this is his mother's house, and it should be about dinner time! "Mom, we have a guest for dinner. Set an extra plate," he calls as we step into the farmhouse. "Ask and you will receive!"

And what a feast it is! This is the type of cooking I grew up with and have known at dinner tables throughout the Midwest: roast beef that's been simmering all day while field and yard work are being done, roast potatoes, salad, cucumbers from the garden, homemade jam, fresh fruit, and freshly-made applesauce from the Yellow Transparency apples gathered from the tree out in the yard. "If I had known you were coming, I would have baked fresh rolls and cookies," Mrs. Goebels says. "That's quite okay," I reply, helping myself to thirds on the applesauce.

One seldom sees this type of cooking anymore. Farmers have sold off their livestock and the home-raised beef is gone. So are the chickens, milk-cow, and even the garden, for "farmwives mostly

work in town now," son Rellen explains and adds, "If you can get one." Half the men from his high school graduating class are unmarried, for fewer and fewer women want to live this kind of life. He just turned forty-two.

For the only time during the pilgrimage, I am asked about Buddhism and my reason for walking. I respond briefly for a couple of minutes, and then the conversation turns to the loss of rental ground and other farm problems, after which Rellen begins speaking of welfare fraud and out-of-wedlock children. I get the feeling that he's given this speech many times before. Judgmental, angry opinions come out of the warm, gentle man who had invited the stranger at his doorstep to supper. I find myself preferring to judge Rellen by his actions, rather than by his words. The Goebels insist that I spend the night, and I accept. I sleep in the guest room, on a king-size bed under soft, cotton sheets.

The next morning, I wake to rain, coffee, toast, and homemade wild plum jam. After a pleasant breakfast, we say goodbye, and I start walking in the rain, under my poncho.

I'm sitting at a crossroads four miles from the Goebels' farm, near a historical marker that commemorates the first survey of this land nearly one hundred fifty years ago. Since I left Omaha, I've passed many historical markers telling how the various native tribes "conveyed their lands" to the white settlers. I've been walking now for nine days on roads that serve as a demarcation of ownership. I've passed countless "private property, no trespassing" signs. Yet, "ownership" of land in this area is based on one man waving his sword at the mouth of the Mississippi River five hundred years ago and claiming all the land drained by that river in the name of the King of France. This is so ridiculous. How can anyone "own" land. This is something I've been wrestling with for years. I hear again the anger in Rellen's voice as he speaks of land he had farmed for twenty-three years being sold to the highest bidder. How fragile, temporary, and spurious all this "ownership" is. Yet, we defend it ever so vehemently: "Violators will be

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prosecuted," the signs say. Saddened, I walk north into Nebraska.

It finally stops raining. I walk over to the edge of a cornfield where a young farmer is cutting weeds. We speak for almost an hour about his struggle to take over the family farm. Despite careful management of assets, the annual costs of putting in a crop are staggering. We speak of the collapse of the grain markets and the need to spray for grasshoppers. He's been sick this week and is wondering if it was the spray. "I had to go into the field to set the irrigation pipe during the two-and-a-half week period the label on the pesticide container said to stay out," he says. We talk about organic farming, but somehow my words ring hollow. I see the farms and the struggles with droughts and low crop prices. I see the failed farms and empty buildings. I see the fear and bitterness caused by the constant effort to stay afloat. I see the deep love for the land. But I've left the farm life behind, have missed the problems of the nineties, and am out of touch with agriculture. These aren't my struggles now. I'm outside, looking in.

Without my asking, the young farmer invites me to his home for dinner. He does not eat, saying, "My wife and I will eat later when she gets home from work." He serves me a pork chop and sweet corn. My last meal as a begging nun is exactly what I asked for at Judy's!

Later, I'm again camping in a wildlife management area on my last night out. The sky is clear black, and stars abound; the Milky Way extends from the southern horizon all the way to the northern. I sleep soundly. At about three a. m., I am awakened by the patter of rain on my poncho. For an hour, I carefully check that the corners are tucked in, so I don't get wet. Then, during a lull in the rain, I quickly stand, allow my poncho to drop over my shoulders, put on my shoes, pick up my gear, and start walking. How simple housekeeping can be!

It rains all morning on my last day. Despite the uncomfortable dampness of

my clothes, the farmer in me rejoices at any rain in July in this part of the country. Last week's blistering weather would have ruined these crops if we hadn't had abundant rain earlier. More is always welcome. I walk into the town of Hebron, the Thayer County seat, and stop at a café for a breakfast of eggs, toast, hash browns, and coffee. Then, I check into a motel. I scrub my feet and lay for an hour in the bathtub. I turn on a space heater to cut the cold and damp of the room, laughing at the irony. Five days earlier, I was sweltering in the heat.

Later, I call Nonin to tell him where I am and ask him to drive out and give me a lift home. As the crow flies, I am one hundred fifty miles from Omaha, but as the nun walks, it's been over two hundred. I was on the road ten days.

Nonin arrives in under three hours, with Li'l Red and our big dog, Badger. Red's feet have healed and he's sprightly as ever. He dashes toward me down the long motel porch and leaps up to kiss my face. We return to Omaha paralleling the route I had taken. Signs on the highway mention towns I had passed but hadn't seen — Odell, Pickerell, Firth. Nor can I see them now, for the new highway bypasses them. Staring out the window, I ask myself, "What had the walk meant; what had I learned?" Well, I learned how to beg. I learned that I can overcome fear and anxiety; they're in the mind. I learned how deeply generous most people are in this part of the country. They take care of people, even strangers.

How, though, had I answered my question about how to be on the land? I had covered two hundred miles on dirt and gravel roads. Mile after mile of just walking. The ache in my hips; the gravel under my feet. Sun, then rain. Stopping to sit in the the grass near the edge of the road, I wiped my brow with my arm -- the smell of dust, sweat, and grass. Now, even my footprints have been washed away by the rain. I remember a poem by Zen Master Dogen:

Coming, going

Coming, going

The waterfowl
leaves not a trace.

Nor does it
need a guide.

Postscript:

Having just re-read this article for the first time since I wrote it seven years ago, I am struck by the fact that generosity has been such a central theme of my life. Begging is such a wonderful practice, because one does nothing to "earn" the food or money. When I began walking the Buddhist path, I felt I needed to become more generous, a better person. I have learned, however, that I can't earn the right to have my life supported on so many levels. I don't "deserve" anything, and yet, everywhere I turn, all I see are the offered gifts. Years ago, I remember someone asking Nonin why he bowed. He responded, "Just bow for twenty years, and then you will know." I think I'll go bow.

Hands palm-to-palm,

Kyoki Roberts

WEEKLY ZENDO SCHEDULE — NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER

Morning

Tuesday — Sunday

6:00 - 7:00 — Sitting Meditation
(Walking as Needed)

7:00 - 7:30 — Service

7:30 - 7:45 — Cleaning

Sunday Only

8:30 — Zazen Instruction

9:00 - 9:25 — Sitting Meditation

9:25 - 9:35 — Walking Meditation

9:35 - 10:00 — Sitting Meditation

10:00 - 10:10 — Service

10:10 - 11:00 — Dharma Talk

Evening

Tuesday — Wednesday

7:00 - 8:30 — Sitting Meditation
(Walking as needed)

Thursday

6:00 - 8:30 — Classes as scheduled

Friday

7:00 - 8:30 — Sitting Meditation
(Walking as needed)

We are closed on Monday

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