**“The Center is Open! A Dream Is Manifesting”**

**Interview with John Travis & Heather Sundberg**

**Edited by Heather Sundberg**

**Tell us about the dream for Mountain Stream to own a community meditation center in Nevada City.**

**John:** I first had the idea of serving a retreat center in the early 1970’s. I had been doing intensive practice in India for some years. The dharma had inspired me to completely re-envision my life. I wanted to see it manifest and grow in the west.

In 1994, soon after Mountain Stream was born as a non-profit, a collective understanding arose among several committed community members that this practice is not just a one-generation process. They had a dream of having a home for community meditation practice; a place of refuge for our cultural sanity. At that time we looked for land for a retreat center, and actually bought some land, but were unable to bring a retreat center to fruition.

**Heather:** When I arrived at Mountain Stream as a ‘visiting teacher’ in 2007, the vision for a community meditation center had already gathered momentum. I remember sitting in board meetings filled with enthusiasm and discussion, at which we poured over advertisements on property for sale. We were still dreaming in those days though.

**John:** In 2010 the remarkable happened. A donor offered us a generous donation covering most of the cost of the beautiful 1.25 acre single family home at 710 Zion Street, Nevada City. The sale of the Robinson Road property, originally intended for a retreat center and was offered by another generous donor, covered the cost of buying the rest of the property and helped us with the massive remodel project to transform the home into a meditation center. Along with the hearts, talents, and time of so many friends of course!

**Heather:** We opened the Center to the public on January 7, 2013, and we are making our home there, for practice to flourish into future generations. I am so happy and honored to be a part of this. Please come visit us!

**The Center is filled with 40 years of collected Buddhist art. Is there any particular story about the art you would like to share?**

**John:** We received word of the purchase of 710 Zion Street while we were studying and retreating in India for a six-month period. As a patron of Buddhist art for the last 40 years, I was excited to envision what statues might be appropriate for the new meditation hall. I discovered that one of my familiar traders in Dharmshala, India had in his collection two exquisite statues; a Buddha and a Tara; both 3 feet tall. I could almost see them in the new meditation hall.

**Heather:** We had some discussion about whether to make the investment in both statues. After all, it was quite a risk to John’s credit card, not knowing whether the statues would ever arrive on US soil from India or not. However, we both agreed it was imperative that the meditation hall embodies representations of both the enlightened masculine (Buddha) and enlightened feminine (Tara).

**John:** The statues made a long journey to be with us at the new Center. They traveled by truck to New Delhi and then on to Mumbai. They were loaded onto a ship to make the long journey across the Pacific Ocean to Los Angeles. Finally the statues were shipped from LA to San Francisco, where they were “liberated from customs” by Mary Helen Fein and Stu Clancy who drove them to the center, where they have lived since the beginning of the remodel.

**Heather:** The beautiful meditation bell in the Hall was shipped from India at the same time, expressly to “sing to us at the end of each meditation period”.

**John:** The two tangkhas (Tibetan wall hangings) of Buddha and Tara in the meditation hall were painted near Swinbunoth, Katmandu, Nepal specifically for the meditation hall at the Center. My long-time friend Shiva Adhikari, who is the liaison to the artist that I have been using for the last 15 years, helped me with this special gift to the Center. Back in Katmandu, Shiva is enjoying the photos of the Center and the art on our Mountain Stream website ([www.mtstream.org](http://www.mtstream.org)).

**What has been done to ‘bless’ the Center so far?**

**John:** Since the time of the Buddha’s death there is a tradition of placing ‘relics’ in the infrastructure of new temples, as well as conducting ‘blessing ceremonies’ to protect the space and empower the practice. Often the relics are the ashes of enlightened masters, sometimes made into amulets. At Mountain Stream Meditation Center our amazing construction team planted ‘relics’ in the floor and walls given to me from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, as well as amulets from Thailand.

We were blessed by having Ayya Santacitta visit the Center in July of 2012 to offer a traditional blessing from the Thai forest tradition. She chanted “Highest Blessings” to bless the Center and sprinkled the space with ‘blessing water’. The Buddha spoke of the highest blessings as being “associating with the wise; residency in a suitable locality; graciously wise speech; supporting one’s family; and business pursuits free from conflict” to name just a few.

**Heather**: The day before the Center opened, we invited a few of the community members who had contributed an exemplary amount of time, heart, and financial resource to building both of the Center and the organizational structures which will serve the Center, to a simple blessing ceremony led by John and myself. That first ‘sit’ in the Hall was so quiet, due to the double paned windows someone generously offered, and everyone shared their intentions for practice at the Center. Gifts were given, and refuges (awakening, truth, community) & the precepts of non-harming were taken; and John made everyone laugh by prancing around the meditation hall sprinkling us with ‘blessed water’. Then we circumambulated through and around the entire building chanting lovingkindness phrases, and wrapping the building in its’ very own ‘protection cord’; which is a reminder of our basic integrity, and capacity to awaken; and ‘protects’ us from habitual unhelpful mind-states.

Of course there have been many other ‘informal and impromptu’ community blessings as well….