

Rev. Zuiko Redding
Narrator

Anna E. Rohl
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Interviewer

Zuiko Redding: ZR
Anna Rohl: AR

Interviewed 2 May 2022

Abstract: An interview with Zuiko Redding, resident teacher at Cedar Rapids (IA) Zen Center. Zuiko was a core member of the Milwaukee Zen Center in the 1980's. Topics discussed include Zuiko's biography and path to practice with Rev. Dainin Katagiri and Rev. Tozen Akiyama, and ordination by Rev. Tsugen Narasaki; the Milwaukee Zen Center's early days with Rev. Katagiri of the Minneapolis Zen Center and its founding members; the process of members sewing rakus and receiving the Buddhist precepts; the arrival and influence of Rev. Tozen Akiyama; the incorporation of the Zen Center as a 501c3 non-profit; the purchasing of the Zen Center's permanent home on Stowell; and the legacy of the Zen Center to Milwaukee. This interview is approximately 87 minutes long, and took place over Zoom, with Zuiko joining from the Cedar Rapids Zen Center in Iowa and Anna from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The interview took place as part of the *Gathering Places* project at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. For more information, see <https://uwm.edu/gatheringplaces>.

Anna Rohl (AR): Here we go. Um, my name is Anna Rohl. I'm here as a part of the Gathering Places Project to learn a little bit about the Milwaukee Zen Center's history, and it is May 2, Monday, at 10 o'clock in the morning. So, to start, would you mind introducing yourself and how you spell your name?

Zuiko Redding (ZR): Okay, I am Zuiko Redding, and my first name is spelled z-u-i-k-o, and Redding: r-e-d-d-i-n-g. And I am presently the pastor at Cedar Rapids Zen Center, and our Japanese name is Jikyōji in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. And I was in Milwaukee from 1980 to 1984. [nods]

AR: Thank you! So first of all, could you tell me when and where you were born. Where do you come from?

ZR: Oh, oh my God! I was born in Mount Kisco, New York, in, on December 15, 1943. And when we were, when I was three my family moved to Port Arthur Texas, which is, it's a coastal refining town right across the border from Louisiana. And I grew up there. And the reason that happened is that my father is, was Cajun and that was his home, that, that area. He actually grew up in in coastal Louisiana but finished, became an adult in [Port Arthur](#).

So I, I grew up in Port Arthur then went off to school at university of Houston in 1961. And did my bachelor's and my master's there. Moved up to Madison to go to UW-Madison for my doctorate. And graduated from there in '76, and then spent time in Virginia and Illinois before coming back in 1981 to teach at UWM [UW-Milwaukee] in the sociology department. And I taught there from '81 to '84, then moved on to Wisconsin Center for Health Statistics, in '84 in Madison at 1 West Wilson. And then from there, in 1988 I went to Milwau—Minneapolis to um, uh, begin the process of ordination.

And from there to, well in 1991, December of '91, I went to Japan, was ordained in January of '92, spent the next six years or so, five or six years, training in Japan. Came back in '97, and came to Iowa City/Cedar Rapids area and I've been here ever since. And we founded a little temple in Cedar Rapids and, here I am! *[smiles]*

AR: Wow, so you, you've seen a lot of the country and the world!

ZR: I've seen a fair amount of it, yeah. *[laughs]*

AR: Wonderful. So now I'd like to hear a little bit about your journey. What brought you to Buddhism and um, tell me a little bit about your faith.

ZR: Well um, I think it really started in, when I was a little kid. And I grew up in—both of my parents had a real antipathy toward the Christian church because of things that happened in in their lives. My mother had been a nurse in New York in a Jewish hospital, it's now that the [great](#) Montefiore Research Hospital, then it was kind of a little place and she nursed holocaust—people who had escaped the Holocaust and managed to get into the United States and basically, had terminal TB. And she heard their stories and felt like, you know, religion was not for her—if there was a God and he allowed this sort of thing she didn't want to have any part of it.

And so I grew up sort of faithless but with a good grounding in, in ethics and responsibility. And, but my father and I used to go for walks, well he used to take me for walks. The first one, I remember, was I was probably about three. And we would walk in the marshes and he would show me um, how things were interrelated and to have respect for every last thing that was there, because it was an important part of everything. And, you know, I could admire the flowers, but not pick them, because if I picked them then there would be no seeds for later, and no animals to feed with those plants.

So that's where I began, and then in college, um, in 1963, our American lit teacher assigned us Alan Watts's *The Way of Zen* to read, because she didn't feel we could understand the transcendentalists unless we knew something about Eastern religion. And I started reading, and it was like coming home, it was like 'Yes, this is where I belong, this is where I need to be,' and I learned to sit, I and two or three other classmates in that, in that—I wasn't the only one was taken with it. *[smiles]* And um, we started sitting and I think pretty much all of us continued in some way or other throughout our lives, but I started reading other, other authors and translators and continued sitting, but you know really didn't—there was there weren't any Buddhist temples around in those days, and, you know, today there's five or six places, you can go in Houston. *[laughs]*

And then I moved up to, with my then husband, to Madison and still there was nothing [*shakes head*]. But I still read and um, was in therapy there for a while and my therapist was another, [*laces fingers together loosely, shakes hands up and down*] you know, push toward Buddhism, because, you know, he knew that was my faith and my spirit, and he got me in touch with San Francisco Zen Center, in—I think this was about in '69 or '70, and so I started getting their publications and such and, you know, and got to read more modern stuff by other people who practice [*raises and lowers hands for emphasis, smiles*], and I went through graduate school, and practiced with a little—and then started teaching and practiced with a little group in Virginia. I taught at VPI—what's now Virginia Tech in Blacksburg for a while. There was a little group there that I sat with, and that was when my practice began being sort of every week and having others right there [*nods*] uh, to talk with.

And then moved from there to Illinois where I, I was, did weekends at a temple in Chicago, then to Milwaukee and naturally I started looking for a place that week or so after I landed. And saw the Dharmadhatu over on North Avenue, it was. And took myself there. And was told 'you know, you can sit with us, but you know there's a Zen group in town.' And they also, they shared space, and I think it was Saturday mornings, the Zen group at Dharmadhatu, so I joined them. And through them met Dainin Katagiri, Katagiri Roshi, in Minnea—from Minneapolis because he came about two or three times a year to spend a weekend with that group [the Milwaukee Zen group].

And [*coughs*] that was when I—the idea that I needed a career change came to me, and took me about four, four or five years to really, [*sets fist on the table for emphasis*] um, be certain about that. And then I went, I moved, first to Madison to the State Center for Health Statistics thinking, you know, to diversify my, my vita so that I could, could land little jobs if I needed them after I became a, a, Zen tea— yeah, a teacher.

And then went to, first to Minneapolis then to Japan, and was ordained in Japan and trained there. So, that was sort of my journey, and it was kind of, was one of those journeys of calling. I didn't much, you know, it wasn't 'I am going to do this', it was like 'yeah, [*nods*] okay I'll read another one.' [*smiles*]

And then, finally, it occurred to me, actually in, at VPI, at Virginia Tech, when, as a junior faculty Member I had to attend commencement in my robes, they had to have somebody there, you know, marching! [*laughs*] And so, then, there was the moment of prayer, and I realized in that moment that while I had always thought of myself as a Christian with a Buddhist veneer, I was actually a Buddhist with a Christian veneer. [*smiles and laughs softly*] And it didn't mean I rejected Christianity, but that wasn't my heart and, and the, the trip into becoming who—what I am today, it was not an actual decision, in fact [*clears throat*], sort of fighting—I didn't fight against, it was like there was a piece in the back of my head that says, 'you know, you get a good salary as a sociologist. [*smiles and raises eyebrows*] What are you doing?' [*laughs*] And, but I did it anyway, and I never looked back. It was like yeah, that's it. So, that's, that's my journey. And it was just, it, yeah that's it. [*laughs*]

AR: Wonderful, thank you for sharing! So, now I'd like to ask a little bit more specifically about your relationship with the [Milwaukee] Zen Center. You mentioned you were there for those four years, but what did those four years look like? What was your time there like?

ZR: Yeah, so I even, I made some little notes. [*shows a sheet of notes*] And, as I mentioned, I was, we were meeting when I first made contact with the group, we met at the Dharmadhatu on North Avenue. I think—I'm pretty sure it's North Avenue, it's the old—it was about a block and a half from the old Oriental Theater. And the—just past the Oriental Theater, it's still there, there was a little restaurant owned by Greeks that had breakfast at 6:30 in the morning [*smiles*].

And we would go, we would sit and then we would go over to—and I cannot remember the name of the place [*after the interview, the restaurant was identified as Ma Fischer's*]. I know it's still there, because I passed it the last, well it's been about six or seven years since I've been in Milwaukee, but I passed it and Tonen [O'Connor], I think, assured me it was still there.

But we met. It was on the North side of North Avenue, and there was a, (I know the Dharmadhatu is not there anymore, so I that's why I'm describing it) it was on the North side of North and there was a bar next door. And one of the, one of the entertainments, [*smiles and nods*] one of the things that happened during Saturday morning zazen was they had a chute that they would send [*raises left hand and slides down in a downward diagonal*] the beer bottles down into, and they would crash on the in the container on the basement floor I guess it was [*smiles and laughs*] so you—for about 15 minutes or so there would be this crashing.

And, so we started there. And then, I don't remember well, perhaps to have, I think, actually, I think the, the Tibetans were moving, is why we didn't—no, that wasn't true either. But we moved into a member's home over on [*pauses to think*] eek, I can't remember the name of the street. I would know it, I, I should have looked it up on Google maps I would, I'll know it when I see it, but I can't remember, but near the university [UWM]. And we sat there for—she was a therapist, and we sat there, for I don't know a number of months, at least. And we also used her office and well, we then moved to a room in her, her therapy office. And the good folks of Shorewood, um, did not like that, and so we had to leave there. And I, and then we move back to her new, a new home that she had.

[*checks notes*] And then in the mid, and, and so that's sort of the movement, but there were about five people in that, in the first years that I really—I was in the group.

And one of them, I know, is still in town and probably would love to talk to you, Tom Tolan. Do you know Tom?

AR: He, we, we hope to talk to him. He was out of town, I think—

ZR: Uh-huh.

AR—until this week, but next week—

ZR: Yeah. [*nods*]

AR: —we hope to connect with him.

ZR: Tom Tolan is a good person. Tom Rauschke and Kaaren Wiken—I don't know if you have their names or not yet, but they were part of that first group. And he spelled R-a-u-s-c-h-k-e, and she's Kaaren K-a-r, uh, K-a-a-r-e-n, and her last name is Wiken, w-i-k-e-n. And they live over in Palmyra, and if you need I can give you an email address for Kaaren.

Then, [*checks notes*] of course Coree Coppinger—C-o-r-e-e, C-o-p-p-i-n-g-e-r—was one of the folks and I think she's still in Milwaukee somewhere.

And then Mike Posnanski, who's unfortunately deceased now.

And who else, let's see [*checks notes*]—Diane! She was Diane Nelson then, she's Diane Martin—m-a-r-t-i-n—and she's in Chicago. She's a, she's also a teacher, and she was kind of the leader of that group, she was—she and I were both lay at the time, and she's, she was the leader, when I, when I arrived. And she is, she has a center I think in [*pauses to think*] what is that Northern suburb of Chicago? Uh, I could find it for you actually and I can send it to you if you'd like. Let me find a pen and I can make a little note here. [*bends over paper to make note*]

Yeah. And, and so those folks were there before me, and there were a couple of other people whose name I can't remember. I remember his first name was Rob, [*laughs*] but again, I don't, I think they moved out of town and are long gone and far away.

So there were these five folks and we—or these few folks and we, we actually sort of had, you know, it was it was not just a, um, we didn't just meet, it was, it was more of a friendship and mutual support group. And we were all pretty serious about, you know, keeping the group going.

And about twice a year or so, several—including Diane, several people had a deep connection with Dainin Katagiri, who is the teacher at Minneapolis (at Minnesota) Zen Center, and we would have him come, oh three times a year for a weekend.

And one of the big events happened in 1982, 83 when 10 of us sewed, sewed rakusu and received, formally received the, the Buddhist precepts from Katagiri. [*checks notes*] And that happened over in Diane's office, in Shorewood.

And I was actually, I was [*pauses*] a partial sewing teacher for that. I, I went to a long retreat in Minneapolis and learned from Katagiri's wife, how to, how to sew a rakusu, how to cut it, and sew it, and, in order to come back and teach the other folks, so we could all sew together. And then Tomoe Katagiri came for a week at the end and helped us finish up. And then Katagiri came and did the, did the precepts and that was kind of, you know, a real step into formal [*taps table for emphasis*], into a formal place. A formal—I don't know, a formal whatever, a formal religious organization, I guess, you know. Ten of us were, were now, were now formally Buddhists.

And so, [*checks notes*] then, shortly after that, Katagiri had a fairly serious illness and his sangha—he was traveling he had—there were little affiliate organizations around the Midwest. There was one in Omaha, one in Milwaukee, one in Manhattan, Kansas, and one in Alaska, and then he was often invited as a guest teacher many other places, and so he did a lot of traveling. And he cut back really seriously and, you know, maybe once a year we could, we could get him to come.

And so we started, and, you know, and as you can tell, we were sort of beginning to be, to attract other people, also. You know, we were growing a bit, we were maybe 10 or 15 by that time. And we felt we needed a teacher sort of like, permanent, like there. [*smiles*] Instead of him or his, his trainees, his deshi that would come in and spend the weekend, with us.

And so we approached him. And he knew of Tozen Akiyama who want, who was, had come to be at Zenshuji in Los Angeles, and his five years was just about up. And he was, he didn't want to go back to Japan. He was looking for another place. So, we had him come up and, and we managed—I think, he came in '84, [*holds hands up, palms together in a thinking posture*] yeah, because he came, he actually arrived, the year, during the year that I, I moved Madison. And while I was in Madison I came up twice a week, came back to Milwaukee twice a week to, to be with a group and to do work and so forth, and to sit. And so, he came in '84, and that was a really big change, I think that was, you know, the next change that...the first sort of really big thing was all of us receiving rakusus and receiving the precepts, actually, and the second one was getting, was Tozen's coming.

And, so. He first was in a little house that his family, he and Fumie, and uh, oh! Yumi. Yumi, who is about, who was about 13 at the time. She's—they are, Fumie is and Yumi are still in Milwaukee. Yumi is now, she married a guy with about a five-syllable Scandinavian name that I can't remember [*laughs*] and she goes by Sandy. Oh! Sandy Netekoven, yes, N-e-t-e-k-o-v-e-n. And I think I still have her email address around. I haven't looked on her Facebook page lately. And usually I get a message, [*smiles*] you know you get those Facebook notifications 'it's so and so's birthday' and when it's hers I usually write a note [*swipes finger as if writing a note*] and go and see what she's doing but I haven't seen one lately.

But they lived in this little house and we had the zendo up in the attic. I think they lived in the house, oh yeah—first the zendo was actually at Diane Martin's, and then, she began needing her space—I think she ended up turning that space into an office or—but she needed it, and so we moved into the attic at, at their residence.

And I remember going to the fabric store and getting yards and yards of sort of, [*stretches hands out wide*] beige duck. You know what duck is? You know fabrics! [*smiles*] yes! Another fiber junkie, are you? Yes! welcome to the club [*pumps fist*] And I, you know, hemmed it [*stretches arms up and out*] and we hung it up on the, the side the to make walls in the attic because, you know, the attic comes down like this [*makes a pointed roof with hands over head*] and you're looking into that little corner [*points to left elbow crease*], so we hung that to make walls in the attic for the, for the zendo, I remember that.

And we had our space up there and Tozen, um, began to—you know, he said ‘this is not really good, we need to have our own place.’ And I said ‘yeah but, money, you know, we have no money we’re barely making it at the moment.’

And we always made it. And this was something, and actually this was something that that fueled me in founding this place [Cedar Rapids Zen Center], was that, you know, if the practice is good you don't need to worry about the finances. And we just always, we had the money for, you know, we paid him a small salary, and had the money for the rent and everything else and, but you know, from that to a down payment and a mortgage on a house was something else.

And he, you know, he finally—I remember, we were driving along um, Newberry. You know, it comes up from the park [Lake Park]and it has that wonderful esplanade and I remember—that’s I think, where Diane lived also—and he says, ‘I found us a house.’ And I looked over at him and I said ‘oh.’ [*smiles and raises eyebrows*] And he said ‘yes, it's on Stowell, let's go look at it.’ And I said ‘oh.’ And then I, then I said, ‘but you know for a house, we need a down payment. And that's, it's going to be \$20- or \$30,000.’ And he says, ‘oh fine, my brother, the futon maker will supply that. He will say—he will give us a loan.’ And I said ‘oh.’

And so we went and looked at the house and I thought, you know, we can't afford this. But he wanted—you know he is the teacher, and in order to really be established and grow, we need this. And so, let's do it.

And, you know, other members were—I think some people got talked into it, others I think were, were on board, far more on board with it than I was. [*smiling and nodding*] The time it was like ‘We’ll find the money somewhere, don't worry about it.’ And so we did it. And now there were sometimes when things were really tight, but, we always did it. And we even paid back his brother, the futon maker. [*smiles*] And had a place of our own.

Well and, and that was just about the time we incorporated. I don’t remember quite when that was, but I remember doing the incorporation papers. I, I borrowed the bylaws and the articles of incorporation from Minneapolis [Zen Center] and kind of restructured them [*rotates hands one over the other*] to, to work for us. And those are probably still there in the archive somewhere. [*smiles*] And so, we incorporated became a 501c3.

And that— well, do we have time for, yeah I think we have time for a funny story. I was, you know, I was working at the State Center for Health Statistics at the time and I’d submitted all the stuff. And I'm sitting there in front of my terminal doing my [*pause*] then we were designing a data collection system for health departments throughout the state county health departments. And so I was working on that, and the phone rings, and it's somebody in Chicago from the IRS. And I said ‘hello,’ and he says ‘well, you know, you've submitted this 501c3 application and we need to know about your religion.’ And he was, he was a—I've never met an IRS person who was bully—who was aggressive or bullying. And he was very kind and very cheerful, and he says ‘yeah, you know, this is, you're a bit strange, and, you know, as a religion you're very—you're not Christian, and so we need to know a little bit more about you. And so one of the things we need to know—’ we went down

the line about things and, and I gave him my answers and he says ‘well, we need to know the history of your religion.’ And I said ‘well, it’s 2500 years old. Do you want the long form or the short form?’ [laughing] And he laughed and he said ‘the short form, please!’ And then, at the end he said ‘well, you know, the basic thing is, we want to know that you’re not just some person starting a religion on your couch in your living room so you can get a tax break.’ And I said ‘nope, we’re not that.’

And so, we got our we got our federal exemption, and there we were. And that meant, that meant for our, our house that people who contributed to the Center could deduct it from their taxes. And so that helped our contributions, [smiling and nodding] and we made it. And we—I don’t remember when the mortgage was paid off, but I remember it got paid off early.

And more people began coming and, well, Tonen [O’Connor] came around that time, actually. And the, she has her memory of our first meeting was that it was us and I was in the kitchen—well, on my end it was zazen, and I was in, I think we were having an all-day sitting and I was in the kitchen getting lunch ready when the phone rang, and I picked it up and, and she was on the other end, she said, and the first thing she heard from me was, [mimes holding a phone to ear, whispers] ‘I have to speak very softly because there’s zazen.’

But the memory I have is, we were having a yard sale, I think on Diane Martin’s front lawn, and she [Tonen] walked into the yard sale. And introduced herself. And, well, and bought a couple of things, I’m not sure she introduced herself, but she bought a couple of things. And then as she was paying she says, ‘do you guys need some help here?’— I think I was the only one, at the time— and she says ‘you need some help?’ and I said ‘yeah!’ and she says ‘well, I’m gonna take these things home and I’ll be back’ and she was and she stayed the afternoon. And she became a—one of the really stalwart members of the Center. She was then at the Milwaukee Rep [Theater].

And, later, when I moved, that was, yeah, that was a bit before I moved to—I can’t remember exactly when she came to the group, but it was a bit before I moved to Madison because I used to stay the night in her guest room when I came in from Madison, to, to be there for the weekend.

And, so, yeah, that’s, that’s a bit about the history of it all.

AR: That was wonderful. That was a great overview. [waves hand in a circular motion]

ZR: Oh great! I’m glad I hit the right points.

AR: Yes, super, super great.

ZR: Oh! – [at the same time]

AR: I wondered— [at the same time]

ZR: Yeah! In those days we had a newsletter, actually, I’m the one that began the newsletter. And if you ever talked to Tozen and ask about the newsletter, he’ll probably tell you about me, [pauses] who

wanted him to write an article every month [*smiles*] for this monthly newsletter. And finally we decided on, I think, bi-monthly, every other month. And I was the one who, well I was the one who, who spearheaded starting it. And I was also the one who wrote all the other news notes, and then, after work at the State Center for Health Statistics I would use their computer to set up the newsletter so that we could print it, set it up and print a copy, actually. And, and, then we would run it off at Kinko's or someplace. Yeah.

AR: About how many did you send? Did you have subscribers from all over Milwaukee and, and beyond?

ZR: I think we had about 200 at first, and then, yeah, we must have ,because I also got us a bulk mail indicia. And so we must have had over 200. I don't think we had four or five hundred, but I think we had more like 250 because we used to have to, you know, tape them together and put the, the labels on them and stuff. [*smiles and nods*] Yeah.

And---

AR: And do you remember—

ZR: I probably somewhere in my files—I hope I didn't, I wouldn't have thrown them away. I'm sure I would have—I have this this memory of this little piece in my head that says, you know, I remember giving, offering them to the Zen Center and they, they said 'Oh, we already have it.' And I thought well, I can keep it. And there was a piece of me I think that was considering throwing them away, but I'm hoping that that piece did not win out. I, I'm hoping they're in a plastic bin up in the attic where I've put a lot of other old files that I don't need around but don't want to throw away. [*laughs*]

AR: Are there any favorite, like, stories or editions of the newsletter that you remember working on or writing.

ZR: I mostly remember Tozen's articles, because I based my own—because they, they struck my heart so. And I base my own articles on the kinds of examples he used, the kind of, um, spirit he broadcast in those articles. [*raises and lifts hands for emphasis*] Things about, you know, doing his training and standing in a garden with his rake, thinking, watching the little kindergarteners go past the wall, and thinking about his own daughter, who was the same age back home and how much he wanted to be with her. [*smiles*] And, you know, very human stories.

But, and, and I think, Tom Rauschke did—Tom and Kaaren are artists— I think he did some drawings for the newsletter, if I remember. And, and then it continued long after I was there. It's now online, of course, but yeah. [*smiling and nodding*] But we reach people that way too, yeah.

And I also remember long talks at the breakfast table. Tozen and I would often have breakfast together after zazen and, especially, I came on Wednesday evening and then went back on Thursday

morning, and so we sit zazen and then after zazen and service, we would have long talks at the, at the breakfast table before I had to scoot off for work in Madison.

And that was really where I first learned, you know, he gave me my, my first introduction to being ordained. And, you know, I, I've been going back and well before, before Tozen came I often would go to Mil—Minneapolis for a week—weekend. And I was beginning to think I, definitely beginning to think about being ordained.

And I kept asking Katagiri 'What is it to be ordained?' 'I don't know.' he would answer. And I would ask other people and they start giving me very fuzzy answers, and I really didn't quite, I mean, people just sort of, there was a bit of, of sort of pride [*sits up straight and sways shoulders back and forth*] about the, the people he ordained who were kind of swanning around in their robes. And, the people sort of held them in high esteem, because they have these robes.

And so I, when I told Akiyama that I wanted to be ordained you know very soon after he came he said 'Okay, let's talk about that. Here's what it's about: it's not that you are the privileged one, who is looked up to. It's that you are the foundation and servant of everyone in this temple. [*smiling and nodding*] And you, you need to consider whether you want to be *that* before you put on those robes.

And so we had many, many conversations about it. And, and he also is the one who got me ready for Japan, he taught me the rudiments of Japanese, as much as we could, we could, you know, get. He actually ended up teaching at UWM, teaching Japanese to, um, provide income for his family. And Fumie was—worked at a little Japanese restaurant that had just started over on, again! Over on North Avenue. [*laughs*]

And, so they, so, and he had before he became—before he was ordained, he actually attended Tokyo Daigaku, Tokyo University, which is kind of like the Harvard or Berkeley of, of, Japan. And at Todai, he was, he was—this was in the 60's—and in 1966 he was, he did aikido, too, in those years, and he was the bodyguard for the head of the Red Guards at Todai.

And we both I think we, we, we, we connected in those years, because we were both raving Marxists! [*laughs*] Well, I think I still am in some—it's not the Marx of what we think of as communists and dictatorships. Marx [*raising and lowering hands for emphasis*] Marx had this notion of the wonders that industrialization could bring so that we no longer needed to work 14 and 16 hours a day, six days a week. We could go to work in the morning and then go fishing in the afternoon, and the key to that was the workers, not the government, but the workers themselves owning their means of production. So that they made the decisions about what they were going to make, and when they were going to make it. And, and giving to each other, according to their needs and taking according to our capabilities.

But anyway, there was, there was Tozen at university, and he studied economics, he became a banker—uh, not a banker banker, but you know, one of those low-level people, you see at your local Bank who takes your money. And he just found the world—well, as sure any Marxist, young Marxist

in their 20's going into a bank would do—he found it deeply, deeply meaningless. And started searching for something else.

Well, I think he took a year off about then and traveled around the world with his aikido teacher, which was where *he* ran into Zen! [*smiles*] He would be, he said, especially in Europe, they would say ‘Oh, you're Japanese, you must know about Zen, tell me about Zen,’ and he was like ‘I don't know nothing.’ It would be sort of like asking us, you know, asking maybe, ‘Oh, you're American tell me about Disneyland.’ ‘Well, [*sbrugs, gestures left hand out to the side*] I've never been, I hear it's nice.’ [*laughs*]

So, he started, you know, being curious about it, and then he ended up from there—and I think, I think it was, well I know he ended up at Mobil oil company, teaching, [*raising and lowering hands, palms together for emphasis*] helping executives learn how to maneuver Japanese culture. Because, you know, there was much business going back and forth, [*waves hands back and forth*] and these guys needed to know, [*shakes head*] because the cultures are like really different. And in Japan, you don't do business with somebody you haven't drunk under the table and, or played golf with. [*smiling*] You want to know who they are, as a human being, first, you know. And we don't, we don't have much problem with it over here. [*laughs*]

But he ended up there, and finally, I don't remember quite how ended up—well, and he got interested in Zen and started going to, I think, in—Ah! yes, he was in Hawaii still—I think he was working for a Japanese language school at that point. Or maybe it was still Mobil. But he found a Zen temple and started going there and started well, he did pretty much the same path I did after that, you know. Got in kind of thick with the teacher and it just, it kind of sucked him in and this—he knew this was what he wanted to do so, he went—he was married, by the time and went back to Japan with his family and went into, oh, I know it's a monastery in Ni—Daieiiji in Niigata he did his training.

And then, after that, you know, was—there are international missionaries [*smiles*] who got sent to America. In those days, in the 70's and 80's, they got sent to America to minister at the Japanese-American temples in, in California, well, on the west coast. And he, he was, he was stationed at Zenshuji, he was, he was ‘missionary number 41’. I remember seeing his papers. [*laughs*] And now I'm one of those! [*raises hands, laughing*] I don't know if I have a number, I think they stopped giving us numbers.

But he knew, they get, you know, you get sent for five years and then you come back to, to Japan in those days. In these days, I mean, I know people who've been here for 30 years. And well in the 90's, we were making—in the 90's and early 2000's—we were making noise, we Americans who are now part of this system, that you know you just barely get to know one of the one of the guys at the, in the organization and he's gone. And they started letting people stay longer. [*nods*]

And so, after his five years, his five years was coming, were coming up, and that was—he knew Katagiri from, because we all know each other from meetings and, and Katagiri said, ‘well, you know I know a place’ and so he came. [*smiles*]

And so that's, that's kind of a little bit about him. He is now in his 90s—let's see, he's about eight years older than I am and I'm 78 so he's probably about 90, 93? And he's now in, near Sevastopol (California). Has a little apartment and living on his retirement and, having retired from, from Zen teaching.

Also, he has another student Jisho Warner, who might be somebody you would want to get in contact with also. Well, she was never—Oh, she was never at Milwaukee. She met him at Hokyoji— at Minnesota Zen Center. He used to come to June sesshin at the Minnesota Zen Center's country retreat, Hokyoji, and she met him there. I remember that now, yeah, because he and I used to go, I used to go with him as he attended to that, for a number of years.

But he, after he left Milwaukee he went to Alaska for a while and that was, I think, when he decided he just wanted to pack it all in and go and read the—he, he was a great reader of the *Rafu Shimpō* the Japanese language LA newspaper. And it's spelled the first—and it's online. [*points for emphasis*] The first word is R-a-f-u, and then Shinbun S-h-i-n-b-u-n, which means newspaper. [*now spelled s-h-i-m-p-o*] Rafu is the 'r' it's the [*pause*] initials for something they call, that is Japanese for Los Angeles. I know the 'r' is for 'r'. Ra-Fu, and a Ra, hmmm. And I don't know what the 'fu' is about, [*smiles*] but you can even look it up online, if you want to. [*After the interview, Zuiko clarified with the following: "The "fu" means "area" or "administrative district" – I looked it up. "Shimpō" is an old word for newspaper – the modern word is "Shinbun". There's an article about Rafu Shimpō in Wikipedia.*]

[*smiling*] But he basically wanted to go find a very quiet place and just read the *Rafu Shimpō*. And every once in a while one of us hears from him. [*laughs*] So.

AR: He sounds like a wonderful teacher and obviously a big part of the Milwaukee Zen Center establishment

ZR: He was amazing. First of all, he, he wanted to—his big thing was he wanted to demystify Zen, just like Marx wanted to demystify capitalism. And, and that was an important piece in those days in the, in the mid 80's, because there was a lot of sort of magical mystical stuff about—going around about gaining enlightenment and flowing mystically and magically in the universe and, you know, your teacher was a great enlightened being, um, who could do no wrong. And people would go up to him and say, 'Oh, Roshi?' and he would say, [*with a very straight face*] 'Call me Tozen. I'm Tozen.'

And, and I finally had to tell—he would call me once in a while at work in Madison and I had to finally tell him to *please* when he called me and he left a message with the secretary to say that he was Reverend Akiyama. Please do not tell her that Tozen called. She thinks you're my boyfriend. [*smiles*]

And, and he was very down to earth very much into doing zazen and a lot of zazen but taking it into your daily life, understanding that this is not some magical mystical thing you do on a black cushion. It's something you do in every moment of your life. And he was, um...

Many teachers in that—and Katagiri was like this, you know, he would come, he would sit zazen and he would give his dharma talks and then he was off upstairs. You didn't see the great teacher. Well,

he didn't—I don't think Katagiri from what I knew of him, and I knew him fairly well, I don't think he meant to convey that but he was, he was a, an introverted person, he wasn't really comfortable with lots of folks around, [*swirls hands*] didn't really know English that well, and so he got out of there as fast as he could. [*smiles*]

Tozen after *zazen* and, and *dharma talk* were, was over changed into his *samue* and worked with the rest of us. And showed us how to work hard. No, you don't just sort of wipe like that, [*waves hand back and forth pantomiming wiping*] you *wipe*, by God! And he, he had an immense wit, I remember he would cut out cartoons that had something to do with Zen, and post them on the bulletin board and at one time that bulletin board was totally filled with Tozen's cartoons. And well actually when I left, I remember that, um.

And he really lived the life, you know, he—well, one of the things he used to say to me when I came and complained about people over our breakfasts is, 'You know, if you have a problem with another person that's your problem. [*pause*] And I'd say 'But no, no'—'It's your problem. [*pause*] Go solve it.' And I was really annoyed with that, but ultimately I figured it out. [*smiles*] Um, and you know, he took responsibility for what he needed to take responsibility for and he didn't mess around. And he was accessible. You wanted to ask him a question, he was there, just go up and ask him, go find him. He was, yeah, he was quite something. I don't know if, um, Tōnen told you much about him or not, but yeah, she has stories from after my time.

But he, he taught me a lot and it wasn't, you know, sitting down and lecturing at me, it was living his life. And I think, one of the other, one of the really big teachings I got from him, was—I don't know, sometime after we were talking about, you know, I wanted to ordain and I wanted to go to Japan, and I wanted to read the founder of our tradition in Japan, Dogen, and I remember, I was, we were meeting in—this must have been very early on, because we were still meeting in Diane Martin's house and at that time I—she had a, she had this huge house, she married this guy that was, like, had bucks, and she had an—off the *zendo* there was a guest room that I stayed in. And I remember once, one evening going in to put my things down and there on the nightstand were two *jiban*, two *jiban*, which is the, the Japanese undergarment for this—[*touches turtleneck under outer robes*] in America, I wear a turtleneck in the winter. It's so much warmer—two *jiban* and a copy of Dogen's *Shobogenzo*. And again, it, you know, it hit me, because he was wanting me to become *me*. And he wasn't, you know, he wasn't wanting me to—it was very obvious in talking with him that he wasn't wanting me to become a priest, because he wanted me to become an ordained person—I don't usually use the word priest, it's, [*shaking head*] it's not really what we do um—but he, he knew that this was what I wanted, and he was going to help with it.

And, what I took away from that is that that's how I should act with everyone, to help them more become more of who they are, and not who I want them to be. Which is often quite different! [*laughs*] And, I was, I was using that yesterday at our annual meeting, kind of, you know, distinguishing between who I want this person to be and how I want them to act, and who they really are, and what I need to do to help them fit in as who they are.

Um, we—our secretary turns out not to know how to take notes. *[laughs]* And that's—it, that it's eminently rem—you know, she, she can be helped with that and definitely wants to be. But to just say, 'Oh no, you should do it this way,' really is not good. To make her into who I wish—she may never be the secretary I want her to be. *[smiling]* But she'll be better, you know, she'll do her job.

So anyway, that is, that is a little bit about Tozen. And, and many people because he was that way, there were a couple of people in the organization, who well, actually, he ran into some, he didn't run into some trouble, but there was kind of—it was another teaching for me in developing the Center. Because Katagiri had been who he was there were a couple, three people who were so deeply devoted to him, and so deeply devoted to the idea that, you know, he was a, he was a perfectly enlightened being, that they didn't really take Tozen dreadfully seriously. They were there, basically, because Katagiri asked everyone to stay for at least two years, not to leave the group. Uh, until Tozen got established. But they didn't really think he was a teacher. And I don't think that affected Tozen very much because there were those of us who did, and new people who came like Toz—Tonen, and Mary—oh God what—Mary Lux, L-u-x.

She is still in town, her husband taught at one of the Catholic colleges in town in those days and they're retired, of course, now. But Mary also, you know, took Tozen very seriously and so did many other people. And so, when those folks left it was kind of, it was okay, *[smiles]* we had, we had a good group and we were going forward. And you know, and that was just—and I think that is one of the things that, um, Toz—one of the ways in which Tozen strengthened the place by demystifying Zen and by the time he left no one blinked an eye that he was leaving and the new teacher was taking over. You know, it was like, 'Yeah. That's just fine, this works.' *[smiles and laughs]*

And, and for me, in my own building of this sangha, my own work, I did not work alone, you know, and I think Tozen would say the same thing that it's not because of him, *[shaking head]* it's because of everybody who came. *[brings hands together]* But I've been really very careful to build sangha that does not depend on me so that, God willing, in a year or two or three I find somebody to take over for me and, um, they sort of, say, 'Oh yeah, well, welcome to the crew!' *[laughing]*

AR: That's a wonderful legacy to leave as a leader.

ZR: It was a—it was one of the best legacies he could have left. Because the group just, *[shaking head]* they didn't miss a beat. They went straight on. And it happened also when Tonen left, and, then, um, and, *[hands on face, thinking]* oh, Reirin took over, yeah. *[smiles]* So yeah. *[checks notes]* That's—

AR: Well, wonderful!

ZR: —that's the story! Yeah, are there any other things you would like to, um, you would like me to mention? Oh, I think you know, there is a last question, about what is unique about Milwaukee Zen Center and what has been its impact on my life and so forth, and my basic notes here are that Milwaukee Zen Center and the Tibetan Zen Center *[note: after the interview it was clarified that the Tibetan Buddhist Center is not Zen]* really brought Buddhism to town. And I think that was one of their big,

their big contributions. I mean, there are probably six or eight Buddhist temples there now [*smiles*] of various kinds, which is wonderful! But I think we began it.

And what is, um, important about it now is that it is still a small center where you don't get lost. You know, at places like San Francisco and Milwaukee [*Minneapolis*] you just sort of got lost in the crowd. At Milwaukee, somebody always comes over to say hello. And it's small enough that people know each other and watch out for each other. And there are people who have been there for now probably 30 years. Who are, sort of the foundation of the place, and will reach out and show you how to do stuff and invite you in to, to be a part of things. And the Zen Center also, especially with Reirin and, and with Tonen, has gotten involved—as I think all pretty much all Zen centers have in America these days—in being part of the community, first of all. I mean, here we get we make a yearly donation to the Boys and Girls Clubs, who take care of the kids. We, we are located in a lower income neighborhood, it's about half Black which I'm proud of. [*smiles and pumps fist*] And the school, of course, is one of the worst in the city, the little elementary school. And the Boys and Girls Club takes care of those kids, and so we give—we don't have a lot of members that can be active all over, so we give to that and we, we take part in local interracial council [*the Linn County Inter-Religious Council*], we're active in the local neighborhood association, and so is Milwaukee Zen Center. And we're not—they're not sort of cut off from everything, but they're part, they're part and parcel of a vibrant community. [*nods*] And I think that's really, really important.

And that's basically it. And you talked about its, its, asked about its influence on my life. I think part of the reason I'm sitting here in these clothes today is because of my years at Milwaukee, and my—and Katagiri's influence, but also very, very much Akiyama's influence. And [*pauses*] so basically, yeah, and, and you know, and through that he's [*stretches out hands*] sending the dharma forth into the rest—into Iowa! [*smiles and laughs*] So, yes.

AR: Wonderful!

ZR: I was—

AR: —Thank you!—

ZR:—I was glad to talk to you—

AR:—can I ask, for like a last, kind of a closing thing, you talked about receiving the Buddhist precepts, and the sewing

ZR: uh, huh!

AR:—as a really big turning point and I wondered—one of our assignments is we have to create a little 'sonic postcard' where we're kind of taking little snippets of stories and putting it together and that seems like something that might be really nice to include. And so I wondered, could you describe that process and its, its significance, it, it doesn't have to be super long, but as a closing question?

ZR: Yeah, um, in Japan it's very different to receive the precepts because everybody grows up Buddhist. And receiving the precepts is, is basically renewing the precepts. In America it's become a way of formally dedicating yourself—at least in our tradition, I don't know about Tibetan and other traditions—but it's a way of formally saying—it's kind of like first it's kind of like first communion or, um, confirmation, more like confirmation. In, we make a formal declaration: 'I am a person who follows the precepts, who, who is a follower and a member of the Buddha'—a follower, a follower of the Buddha and a member of his congregation.

And to do that, first—well, most people are now adults who are converting, so there's, and there's likely a different process that will develop as, as kids grow up with Buddhist, and probably has developed in, on the west coast. But, you practice for a year or two with a sangha, with a temple, at a temple, and then learn about the precepts and there's usually—uh, here if you come to me asking to receive the precepts after a year or two of being here, we spend some time learning about the origins their origins, where they come from, you know, [*smiling*] they're not given by God, like the 10 commandments so where? And what they are and how we relate to them, because that's also very different from Christianity. The precepts are things we consistently aspire to follow. They're not things you can ever do perfectly. Uh, and they're not things you get sent to hell, for not following, but [*smiles*] you get your rewards right here. And so, after we're—as we're studying the precepts together, there is a sewing project, in which—[*looks down and behind*] and I'm reaching behind me to see if, I think I have a rakusu here that I wear for our Monday night dharma discussion—ah, I can't get it. Yes, I can! There we are.

We sew this small thing [*holds up a camel colored rakusu in front of the camera*] that looks like this. It's a kind of, Katagiri would say it's a distillation of the Buddha's robes, and each of those seams is hand-sewn. We cut the pieces, and there's a whole 2500 year old history behind that [*laughs*]—we cut the pieces, and then each person, you sew your own by hand, with help from the rest of the sangha. But [*raises and lowers hands for emphasis*] the idea of sewing is to develop your practice in everyday life, to take those stitches [*pauses*] and not be, not criticize ourselves because they're not as good as they could be, nor be proud of ourselves because they're really, really good. And when we make a mistake, and you know, instead of being straight [*wiggles a finger downward imitating an uneven seam*] that line is going like that, we take it out and do it again, and through that develop how we are in the world.

And then, when we finish that, um, we—there is a whole ceremony for receiving the precepts in which we receive this garment [*holds up the rakusu again*] which I've kind of muddled up. My teacher's drawing [*flips rakusu, shows the calligraphy drawing on the other side*], my teacher was Tsugen Narasaki in Japan, and he, um—I can never move, he—this was sent out for his 7—he sent this out for his 77th birthday, this one. He's now 95, and still going strong.

And, but we take—we receive the garment [*presses hands to chest*] and we receive, then we agree to each of the sixteen precepts. And then we've done it. [*smiles and nods*]

And then we wear this [*puts on rakusu*] at our— [*pauses to adjust rakusu around her neck*] cotton on cotton doesn't really slide real well—we wear this when we do zazen. And for instance yesterday at our annual meeting, people who had received the precepts wore their rakusus. And, and it's—it reminds us that we've done that, it reminds us that we are as, as the ceremony puts it, 'a child of the Buddha.' And how we should act, how we should conduct ourselves, and how we should, how we should respect the world. As, as a child of the Buddha who observes the precepts. So that's basically it.

AR: Thank you for sharing that and going into even more detail. That's—and yours is beautiful I love that you have your teachers drawing on it—

ZR: Yeah—

AR:—that's so cool!

ZR: He, he was the son of a Buddhist teacher and he and his brothers and sisters got lined up every morning before school to learn calligraphy [*pantomimes writing in calligraphy*] and he, he loves doing it.

And one of, I don't know, you know, it's just a small story I'll share but—at your full ordination [*brings one hand to chest, leans forward*] you write papers [*moves one hand downwards and back and forth as if writing*] which then [*pantomimes a signature*] your teacher adds a declaratory paragraph and he signs and you're there as he does that. And I remember watching Tsugen Roshi write this, and, I swear to God, it was more like there was sand on the paper [*waves hand as if brushing off a flat surface*] and he was brushing off the sand to reveal the letters, rather than he was [*pantomimes writing out letters*] actually making those letters. It was so fluid and so effortless. And I will always remember that. [*smiles and nods*]

But he also—he's like, he's like Tozen. When I first arrived in Japan, he was—I, I met him because he was a friend of Katagiri Roshi's, whom, um, I'd first asked Katagiri Roshi for, for, for ordination because Tozen didn't feel that he was up to the task. And then, Katagiri Roshi, Katagiri died before I could be ordained and he—and I had known Tsugen Narasaki, and so, when—and so Tsugen Roshi said, 'Yeah, I'll do it.'

And so, when I first was in Japan, as a layperson come to become his student, the first things he showed me—we went to his home temple—and the first things he showed me [*points up and out*] were the 12th century joinery on the temple gate, [*lifts and interlocks hands like joinery*] and explained so that wood was done and how the pieces were structured so that they would, they would shake in an earthquake, [*lifts open hands up*] and leave the roof, where it was.

And then the other thing was the new roof, and the gutters. Gutters! [*nods*] A new-fangled thing in in Japan, and they had just been put on the main service hall, weren't they beautiful? [*smiles*]

That was my—[*laughing*] and I'm sort of a construction worker too so we, you know, he was, he was, he *is* a very down to earth very 'hey, that needs doing over there [*points*], get somebody to go replace

that paper' kind of person, and you know, there was there was no area—there is no airy fairy-ness to him. And he's another guy who walks around with a 'Call me Tozen' manner. [*laughs*] He is hugely esteemed in Japan. And, you know, people fawn over him but it's like, 'I'm Tsugen.' So. [*laughs*]

AR: Yeah, another great teacher in your—

ZR: Oh, God!

AR: --your making

ZR: I I have had *wonderful* teachers. Katagiri was also really good, but in a very different way from Tozen and Tsugen Roshi. Yeah.

AR: Well, I want to be mindful of your time.

ZR: Yeah!

AR: Thank you so much for your stories, the last--

ZR: You need—you're a good graduate student, you need your time too! I remember graduate school!

AR: [*laughing*] Yeah! The last thing I want to do is, we call it taking 'room tone,' which is where I'll just have like 30 seconds of silence, so that if, when we're editing you know, we need a little transition sound it'll sound the same as the rest of the recording. So in just a second I'll just, I'll go on mute, you can stay sound on and we'll just get the 30 seconds. But during that time, just think if there's anything else you want to say.

ZR: [*whispers*] Drat! I now remember that I forgot to bring the yeti [speaker] up.

AR: Oh! It sounds good on my end so far I think we'll be fine.

ZR: Okay.

AR: You never know, you know, if you're going to have some people, you know—we don't even hear the air conditioning, like, come on in our house and then in a recording sometimes the computer—that's all you hear, but I think we're good.

ZR: No—

AR: I've been thinking how clear you sound, so.

ZR: The heat did not come on and not too many cars came by the—well, and the, the window is closed.

AR: So yeah, yeah I think we're fine. Anyway, I'll start room tone. And if you just, if you after room tone, if you think of anything you're like 'oh yeah, I can't believe I didn't say— you have to know this thing' we'll have time to do that. So, here we go for room tone.

[*about 30 seconds of silence*]

AR: All right, I think—

ZR: [*quietly*] okay.

AR: —it's good.

ZR: Great! And if you—

AR: [*at the same time*]Any last inspirations?

ZR: Yeah?

AR: Any last inspirations you want to add?

ZR: No, I think that's all but, um, if you have further questions, please email. And I will see if I can find the things from Milwaukee Zen Center. And how should I transmit them? Should I—

AR: Yeah, email is fine, um, that—I think that works well.

ZR: I can scan and a couple things and, actually, if, if I find that trove of newsletters you can probably have them if you want—

AR: Okay, yeah.

ZR: I can box them up and send them off at the at the post office. And, there was something else. Oh yes, did Tosen mentioned that there is a book published about the first 35 years of the Center?

AR: Yeah, yes!

ZR: And some of Tozen's talks are in there.

AR: Oh, ok, yeah! We should take a look at that.

ZR: Yeah you might be able to get a copy from her or, or oh Reirin, Reirin would probably have a copy.

AR: Yeah! [*takes note*]

ZR: Yeah.

AR: Yeah, that's a good idea. Um. Yes.

ZR: And also—

AR: [*starts talking at the same time*]

ZR: Oh, go ahead. [*smiles*]

AR: And if you—if I don't know, just time wise, how many more interviews we'll get the chance to do, but if you want to pass on, you know, contact information I can even kind of, you know, keep that in our records so anyone doing further research, you know, knows who might be good people to talk to. Um, and then the other thing is—what was the other thing I was gonna say? Oh, like addresses! One part of our project is we're supposed to like, map maybe any movement, so if you can find, like different—let's see, was it Diane? Like her home or office, um, I'm happy to see that, but if we can't that's okay, too.

ZR: I think I can!

AR: Cool! That would be great! So yeah, if you email that along I'll, I'll map it on our map point.

ZR: Great!

AR: Alright, and then the last thing is, I think I need part of our uploaded this interview will be on the picture of you to tell people who you are. So, I wasn't sure if I should use the one from Cedar Rapids' website, or if you have a different picture of yourself you'd like to represent you.

ZR: I think Cedar Rapids is fine. I don't—I don't know what picture is there but I'm sure it's a good picture. [*smiles*]

AR: Yes, you look very cheerful and approachable! I was very encouraged, when I saw it—

ZR: Oh good, okay.

AR: I was like 'oh, good.'

ZR: Yeah. That one's just fine.

AR: Okay. Thank you again so much for your time and your stories!

ZR: Yes, and, I enjoyed it very much. And I'm glad to see Zen Center be part of the history of Milwaukee, yeah.

AR: Me too. I'll keep you updated on our, on our progress. And I'll send you—I'll send you a transcript of this. Part of our assignment, again, is to type up this conversation, and then you can look it over, you know, and if you're like 'Oh, I said '84 and I meant '85' or anything—

ZR: Yes!

AR:— anything like that, you can look it over.

ZR: I would be happy to do that. Great!

AR: Great! Thanks so much!

ZR: We'll see you next time! [*waves*]

AR: Bye!

ZR: Take care. Bye-bye!