

# *Bodhi Stand*

*compiled by Bhikshuni Heng Ch'ih*



*"Marion Guo Mwo Robertson*

*For there's only one vehicle in the worlds great and small,  
The Lotus of Dharma which blooms in us all.  
There's only one vehicle not two or three.  
Rejoice now for one day Buddhas we'll be!*

"As a child, school never made much sense to me. What did make sense was the Christian girl's club and summer camp which I attended. I enjoyed the non-competitiveness, the singing and the Bible-study which often ended with having us ask ourselves whether or not we had been saved. I was never entirely sure of my answer, but the question kept me continuously aware of the fact that I could die at any moment and would hope to be on God's good side when the event occurred. Life was a constant conflict among my desires to be like Jesus, to meet my parents' image of a normal healthy child, and to satiate my own greed for possessions and popularity.

"I tried to model myself after the daughter of a minister, a girl one year older than I. Her concern for others and love of Jesus gave her a radiance that I felt I lacked. She often spoke glowingly of her desire to someday be a missionary in Africa. When I was 12 years old, she was killed when a car struck the bicycle she was riding.

"Influenced by my religious training and my young mentor's sudden death, I spent a great deal of time wondering, 'If time is infinite and life is so short, what lies beyond what I can see now? When I die, I will no doubt review the quality of my life. What should I be doing now in order to feel that my life has been truly worthwhile? How can I know truth?' I spent a great deal of time alone."

Off to college, Marion attempted to taste as many experiences as possible "which were not harmful to others" hoping to gain some insight into who she was and why and how

other people were different from she. But in seriously questioning her Christian faith, she managed to strengthen it and eventually dropped out of college with the primary goal of "praying without cease."

What followed was a period of social work with emotionally disturbed teenagers, a drive around the United States, a winter of asceticism and extreme isolation in New Mexico and still the goal of "praying without cease" was interrupted by distractions of the mind.

Returning, without regrets, to California, Marion entered John. F. Kennedy University and found that the Dean was as fascinated by death and as curious about what came after death as she was. Through readings recommended by him, she became convinced that reincarnation was a fact. With this insight she also came to another realization: "If I really wanted to understand life and death, I would need a spiritual guide--someone who had gone beyond this earthy plane and returned with no loss of sanity. I had no idea how to find such a person."

An invitation from the director of the East West Academy of Healing Arts, for whom Marion worked, to spend Easter weekend at the City of 10,000 Buddhas coincided with a class assignment to "go have a cross-cultural experience." I knew virtually nothing about Buddhism and was nervous about spending a night at a monastery, but I was also too lazy to try to think of another way to complete my class assignment.

"The experience was mind-boggling! Lunch began and ended with young Americans reciting in Chinese followed by a lecture which I didn't understand at all, then a tour of the grounds, and an introduction to meditation which ended with an earthquake at the very moment the Abbot arrived to join our seated circle. He gave a talk about how the intertwined roots of a tree which was being used for an incense holder was originally Adam and Eve but they were too attached, too much in love, so this was their fate. I left before the afternoon lecture the next day, afraid of being totally overwhelmed by this exposure of my ignorance.

"A year later a fellow Shanti Project (counselling for dying and grieving people) volunteer had organized a forum to discuss various religious viewpoints on life after death. A representative from Gold Mountain Monastery would be one of the speakers. I had to go. Afterwards, I asked one of the monks if it would be possible for me to visit the City of 10,000 Buddhas. He assured me I would be welcome."During the weekend I chose to go, Heng-yin spoke and I found myself taking lots of notes and again getting a great deal of input that would take a long time to absorb.

"At the end of the weekend, Heng-yin played the guitar and sang some songs she had written. Previously, I had been training myself as a wine-taster. When Heng-yin explained the five precepts and then sang "Chicken, Oh Chicken," I immediately gave up drinking. "One Great Vehicle" described a father standing outside a burning house calling to his children to come out. As Heng-yin sang a line "but they were too busy with their toys inside," the analogy became all too clear to me and I buried my face on my knees as I burst into tears. I knew I would have to return someday if for no other reason than to find out how the song ended!

"I returned in the fall and took refuge after the opening ceremonies at the City. Heng-yin's music had powerfully affected my life and when I heard that she was making a record, I started telling everyone about it. Everyone--my friends, television stations, stores, radio stations...Gradually I became more involved with Wondrous Sound. In November of 1980 I moved to the convent in San Francisco and began working full time for Wondrous Sound.

"In studying the publications of the Buddhist Text Translation Society and attending lectures, I've had an opportunity to learn a great deal, but not so much as I've learned from witnessing the Abbot's patience and compassion as well as the dedication and hard work of the Sangha at the City of 10,000 Buddhas.



*The Delegation at Pee Low See Temple, Singapore Over A a thousand people took refuge with the Triple Jewel.*