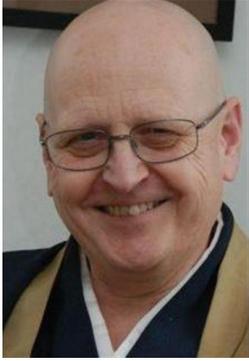


---

## Kyogen Carlson



Carlson, Kyogen 65 Oct. 08, 1948 Sept. 18, 2014 Our deeply beloved abbot, teacher and friend, Roshi Kyogen Carlson, died unexpectedly Sept. 18, 2014, of a massive heart attack. He was a few weeks short of his 66th birthday. He is survived by his wife of 32 years, Gyokuko Carlson; several cousins; and many, many students and friends. He was preceded in death by his parents; dog, George; and cat, Eppie. Kyogen was born Oct. 8, 1948, in Los Angeles. He was an only child and grew up in a Christian Science family in Fullerton. He attended California State University, Fullerton, and then the University of California, Berkeley, where he took a B.A. in Sociology. He felt a powerful drive to understand the meaning of our human life and this world, and a year after graduation, decided to enter contemplative life. He joined Shasta Abbey, a Soto Zen Buddhist training monastery in Northern California, in 1972. He spent his novice year working in the kitchen and then served for nine years as the jisha, or personal attendant, to his teacher, the Abbess Jiyu Kennett. She transmitted him as a Buddhist priest in 1974. In 1982, after several years of chaste courtship, Kyogen married a fellow priest, Gyokuko Gass, and in October of that year, they moved to Portland to serve as priests at the Oregon Zen Priory. At the time the

Priory, a satellite group of Shasta Abbey, had about 25 members. Several years later, the Carlsons separated from Shasta Abbey and created an independent temple called Dharma Rain Zen Center. In 1987, Dharma Rain bought its first of several buildings in the Hawthorne neighborhood, beginning its steady growth; today's active membership is about 200. Kyogen had 50 disciples, both lay people and monks, and transmitted five dharma heirs. In 2012, supported by Kyogen's optimistic vision, Dharma Rain bought 13.5 acres in Northeast Portland and is in the midst of developing this land into a large, integrated Soto Zen temple, training residence and 32-unit cohousing complex where Kyogen and Gyokuko planned to live. He was a happy man. We remember his great kindness, gentle nature and generous heart. We remember his goofy sense of humor and how often he laughed. He could swing at a baseball or race a go-kart with the enthusiasm of a child and then explain a fine point in Dogen's Shobogenzo. He had a scholar's memory of Buddhist scripture and a nerd's love of science. He was inquisitive and loved gadgets of all kinds, and could often be seen fiddling with his smart phone or calling someone over to see something on his computer. Kyogen loved to travel and made several trips to Japan, as well as China, Switzerland, Italy, France and Uganda. He was a runner for years and loved to hike, camp and tend the vegetarian grill at a barbecue. He loved to watch sports, and followed the California Bears, Lakers and Trail Blazers. He loved books; Kyogen and Gyokuko read aloud to each other on long drives and camping trips. He did not like being fussed over; he liked things neat and clean. He could be cranky, especially when the Sunday morning chanting was off-key; he had a great love of music, a beautiful voice and we could lean on his fine tenor to lead the way. Kyogen was a fine amateur photographer. He wrote one book "Zen in the American Grain," many essays and gave countless Dharma talks. A man of ethics and respect, Kyogen was a longtime member of the American Zen Teachers Association, which relied on him for many years for sane and comprehensive minutes, a member and past president of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association and custodian of the Buddhist Chapter of the Foundation for Religious Diplomacy. In the last decade, Kyogen led many dialogues with evangelical Christians and promoted thoughtful interfaith conversations. His last recorded talk, given the day before he died, was a conversation about interfaith diplomacy between Kyogen and Dr. Paul Metzger, professor of Christian theology and theology of culture at Multnomah University. Kyogen and Paul had become close friends. He was humble about his accomplishments but vain about a few things, including his goatee. He was looking forward to retirement, after many decades of stalwart religious practice and unwavering leadership. Retirement looked like a chance to write another book, long-anticipated trip to Austria, restful afternoons on the deck and a cold microbrew in front of a football game. We who knew, loved and studied with Kyogen know that he had an uncompromising faith in the transformative process of Zen Buddhist practice, a great trust in the Absolute and believed that true Awakening is available to all of us in time. This is one of his many gifts to us. A funeral was held Sunday, Sept. 21, 2014. A public memorial is planned for Thursday, Nov. 6, 2014. See our website, [dharma-rain.org](http://dharma-rain.org), for details. Donations may be made to Dharma Rain Zen Center, P.O. Box 13325, Portland, OR 97213-0325.

---

Published in The Oregonian from Sept. 22 to Sept. 24, 2014