



## ***Memorial Celebration: Anagarika Dhammadinna***

On Sunday, September 13, 2015 a much beloved Theravadan teacher was honored. It was the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of Anagarika Dhammadinna. The day of remembrance was co-sponsored by *Dhamma: A Theravada Buddhist Society* and *Sakyadhita Canada Association of Buddhist Women*. The event was held at Rosemary Heights Retreat Centre in Surrey, BC. A five-day meditation retreat lead by Sakyadhita Canada's President, Jayanta (Shirley Johannesen) followed the event.

Tsunma Tenzin Dolma , a local Tibetan nun , opened the day with chanting and offered some wise words to welcome and encourage the warrior in each of us. Not the aggressive model of warrior that we usually associate with the word – but with the more feminine version. A warrior that is a defender of kindness, truth, and wholesome qualities and something that each of us are responsible to cultivate and act upon. The theme became a common thread throughout the day, and was especially evident in relation to Anagarika and the life she lived.

A number of personal reflections were given throughout the day in tribute to a unique woman who had affected people so profoundly. The reflections were deep, heart focused and often very moving. Students, friends and neighbours offered their stories. Submissions from those who were unable to attend were shared with those in attendance.

One of Anagarika's long time students, Jayanta (Shirley Johannesen), presented a power point presentation of Anagarika's life – entitled, "Heart of Light." Jayanta presented a version of this paper at the Sakyadhita International conference held in Vietnam.

Through Jayanta's presentation, we learned a lot about this appreciated teacher. She was born, Anna Burian, in Austria in 1913. She trained as a nurse in England

and was interned there when war broke out, unable to return to Austria until 1947. In 1951, she and her son, Walter, immigrated to Canada and resided in British Columbia. She worked as a nurse, was an avid swimmer, an artist, as well as teacher (of sculpture) at the Vancouver Art College in Vancouver (now known as the Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design). In 1961, she took a freighter to India seeking answers to the deep questions that had occupied all of her life. In 1964 in Sri Lanka, she took Buddhist monastic ordination - her preceptor, the late Venerable C. Nyanasatta Maha Thera (a Czechoslovakian-born scholar monk) - and was given the name Anagarika Dhammadinna.

Anagarika, the name she preferred to go by, was a well-respected and dedicated student. While in Sri Lanka she practiced meditation, and also studied Dhamma and the Abhidhamma before returning to Canada. According to Jayanta's research, Anagarika may in fact be the first Theravadan nun in Canada and perhaps one of the first in North America. Anagarika lived in British Columbia, moving to the Sunshine Coast in 1977. She had a small, but dedicated clutch of students, many of whom became meditation teachers as well. Some of her early students formed at least three associations: Calgary Theravada Society in Calgary, Dhamma: A Theravada Buddhist Society in Vancouver, and Light of Dhamma in Edmonton.

Over the years Anagarika brought in many renowned teachers to further support her students' development, such as; Venerable Piyadassi Maha Thera, Venerable Balangoda Anandamaitreya Mahanayaka Thera, Venerable Nyasasatta Maha Thera, Venerable Ayya Khema, Achan Sobin Namto and Venerable Punnaji Maha Thera .

Anagarika died on September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1990. However, the work that she did and the lives that she touched have had lasting results. Many of the long-time meditators in western Canada have roots that trace back to Anagarika's teachings, or to those of her early students.

Anagarika's family – her son Walter, and his wife, along with their two sons and their families, including two of the great-grandchildren, attended. They brought many artifacts with them: old photographs, some of Anagarika's sculptures, and even an art piece that was sculptured by one of her art students. The family shared stories of their "mom" and their "Grandma" and noted that the Buddhist part of her life was not something they knew a lot about. It was touching to see how much they appreciated getting to know this aspect of their dear one's life and how she has touched so many people, even after all these years.

There was an opportunity to network and share more stories over lunch. The organizing committee created aprons and book bags that were available for sale, and which displayed a logo created with "the hands" that were based on one of Anagarika's sculptures.

A video submission by a former student, Gregory Kramer (author of *Insight Dialogue* and cofounder of the Metta Foundation), was shown in the afternoon session. It

related many stories of the early days studying with Anagarika and included some humorous events, which had many people nodding their heads in agreement. Each of the reflections that were shared throughout the day spoke of Anagarika's commitment, clarity, and wisdom. Many noted her fierceness and warrior-like qualities in the way she lived and how she taught. It was clear her impact is still felt strongly to this day.

The day concluded with closing remarks, comments from the family, the sharing of merit, and with Loving Kindness. The version of Loving Kindness used, translated by Anagarika, was, for many of us the first version of Metta that we had ever seen.

### ***Loving Kindness***

*(Anagarika Dhammadinna's translation)*

*Let me be free from greed, hatred and delusion  
Let me be selflessly giving, understanding and insightfully clear  
My heart is filled with Loving Kindness  
Every cell of my being is filled with Loving Kindness  
And I am protected.  
I am sending out Loving Kindness in all directions  
North, south, east and west  
To all points in between, above and below  
Loving Kindness reaching out to the corners of the Universe  
Touching all animate and inanimate things  
Touching everyone, touching everything  
A whole universe filled with Loving Kindness  
And I shall receive Loving Kindness from all beings without exception*

*Loving Kindness to All  
Loving Kindness to All  
Loving Kindness to All*

Anagarika Dhammadinna was someone who walked her own path, who had made (for that time) unconventional choices, and who practiced and generously shared her wisdom of the Dhamma with all those that she met along the way. Waves of gratitude were flowing back to her.

May each of us continue to benefit from this warrior with a 'heart of light' and may we develop that light so that it shines within each of us. In this way, we are interconnected and the Dhamma lives on through us.

**Sokhi Hontu!**  
*May all beings be happy*  
*(one of Anagarika's favorite sayings)*