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Behind the Veil of Boulder Buddhism:

Ed Sanders
The Party

When the Party's Over
an interview with
Allen Ginsberg





THE PARTY

A chronological perspective on a confrontation at a Buddhist Seminary

Introduction

I was invited to teach a course at the Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics in June and July of 1977. I decided to title the course Investigative Poetry, based on the poetic principles explored in my book of the same name published by City Lights Books.

I prepared a series of lectures around the central themes of Investigative Poetry, namely that poets assume a greater portion of the description of historical events, as in ancient civilizations, utilizing data-collection and investigative techniques of a data-retentive era such as ours.

It was my objective to encourage students to write samples of investigative verse, and for the entire group to take on an investigative project on an issue in the Denver-Boulder area. I had thought the group might choose to undertake some bardic sleuthery out at Rocky Flats, or to examine the strike that was then going on at the Coors company, or perhaps to fan out in the direction of Sterling,

Colorado, to try to beam some hard Sophoclean light on the cattle mutilations case.

Prior to arrival at Naropa Institute I had never heard of the stripping incident at Snowmass, Colorado. Better to fill one's mind with the Galactic Land-Fill than the gossip of bard-babble. At an early meeting of the Investigative Poetry class, there was a general discussion on what sort of bardic sleuthery to undertake. To my surprise the class decided overwhelmingly to take a look at the circumstances of the Halloween party. Robert Bly had recently read in Boulder, and had delivered an energetic stage rendition of the stripping, which had created quite a stir. Wherever one went on the Boulder literary scene that summer, the matter was dancing on many lips, yet few seemed certain as to what actually had transpired at Snowmass. The National Endowment for the Arts had recently turned down a grant request from the Kerouac School, in part, it was thought, because of gossip about the Merwin-Naone-Trungpa matter spread-

Report prepared and written by members of the Investigative Poetry Group, at the Naropa Institute, June 16-July 13, 1977, with additions in August & September, 1977.

The Investigative Poetry Group included members of the Investigative Poetry class, first session, Naropa Institute: Antler, Arnold Aprill, Randy Blair, Whitney Blauvelt, Glenn Dorskind, Philip Fryberger, Wayne Hall, Jan Johnson, Simon LaHaye, Helen Luster, Matthew McCabe, Richard Nager, Brad Pearman, Mark Pickering, Tom Pope, Al Santoli, Mark Sargent, Alan Sobel, and Arthur Trupp, with special additional work by Bataan Faigao, Tasha Robbins, Miriam Sanders,

and Simone Lazzeri.

Ed Sanders, investigation coordinator. Albert Santoli, associate. Title by Deirdre Sanders & Rick Nager.

The Party, A Chronological Perspective on a Confrontation at a Buddhist Seminary

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ing in literary circles. The case, as they say, was hot.

It seemed like a matter fit for careful elucidation. I agreed to procede, serving as project coordinator, with "Not to assume facts not in evidence" to be the guiding principle of the investigation. The main ground rules were that everyone participating should prepare detailed question lists, or Q-Lists, prior to interviews, and to try to tape record interviews where possible, and to write detailed reports and transcripts of interviews.

The Investigative Poetry Group was extremely eager to work, and the walls of my apartment at Naropa faculty housing grew fairly filled with large "flow charts" tracing in chronological detail what was known about the stripping incident at that time. My apartment became the "Squad Room." The work was ceaseless. Investigators arrived early in the morning, to prepare Q-lists, to work on the flow charts, to prepare transcripts of interviews. Sometimes there were five typewriters being used at once in the living room. A couple of times the work lasted till dawn.

The bulk of the 179-page report was finished in less than a month. Only the inspired dedication of the 24 people in the Investigative Poetry Group made it possible. Anyone who has spent time at Naropa will know the distractions — the rounds of dinners, the readings, the lectures, the lure of the mountains, the parties, the logging of thrill-units.

It would be proper to say that Naropa was less than eager for the report to be written, but on the other hand at no time, then or now, did anyone try to suppress the investigation, or to harass anyone who was preparing it. In addition, the Kerouac School in my opinion is an important and unique institution of poetics in America. It bubbles with creativity; with the exchange of ideas on an elevated plateau. It has brought a vast spectrum of poets to Boulder from many different poetic and meta-physical perspectives. People no doubt will soon, if not already, begin to write PhD theses on the Kerouac School.

On the other hand, the incident at Snowmass was an encroachment that should not be allowed to be repeated. One sure way to prevent such encroachments among sane people is through relentless, ethical investigations such as the one that produced *The Party*.

Regarding publication of *The Party*, the Investigative Poetry Group proceded democratically. During the summer of 1977 the group voted to delay any decision on publication for a few months. In October–November of 1978 a vote was conducted by mail, with the result being 14–4 to publish. The full text will be published this year by Poetry, Crime, and Culture Books, Woodstock, New York.

— Ed Sanders

Anne Waldman suggests Naropa to Merwin, New Year 1975

Anne and Merwin ran into each other in NYC street just before New Year 1975. Anne had met Merwin once or twice before but didn't know him personally very well, though she knew and respected his work.

Anne and Merwin met for a New Year's toast and had intense spiritual discussion — "Meaning of life, death, pain."

"Merwin was asking me about teachers. Tibetan teachers. So he was interested in some way connecting with a teacher . . . I don't think he had a clear idea of what he wanted to connect with, necessarily. We didn't know each other terribly well, but I guess he knew that Michael and I and John Giorno had travelled to India and connected with certain lamas there and he was curious about connecting himself in some way — and I think it was fear of death, getting older, some kind of quest in his own life. We had a very interesting conversation about Buddhism and my relationship to it. I said I was not going back to India, in fact, I was going out to Naropa that summer, '75, to work and run the Kerouac School, but that it was a Buddhist situation and perhaps he could connect this way. Connect with Chogyam Trungpa. And I think he knew something about Chogyam Trungpa, perhaps read his books, I don't know.

" . . . I felt genuine warmth and compassion from Merwin in his wanting to come (to Naropa) and study Buddhism . . . It was Merwin's own decision to come. I merely suggested he come, he was very ripe for a move toward this."

Anne Waldman (Santoli) 6/23/77

Merwin at Naropa as a Buddhist student

Summer of '75 Merwin was interested in Trungpa as a teacher, was very adamant about his desire to go to the

seminary. It was somewhat out of the ordinary . . . people are supposed to apply a long time ahead of time . . . there are certain advance requirements. "So it was a favor."

David Bolduc (M. McCabe) 6/24/77

Merwin came to Colorado with the idea of studying Buddhism and for the mountains . . . had been interested in Buddhism for a long time; sat in meditation long before anyone knew . . . had had contact with Trungpa before summer of '75 (lectures, might have met him informally) . . . he has a strong belief in book learning and western intellectual study which set him in immediate tempermental opposition to Trungpa's 'crazy wisdom' direct experience . . . he also has a strong populist belief in the complete privacy of individuals and of not submitting to external controls (he once turned down a lucrative teaching job because of his refusal to pledge allegiance to N.Y. Constitution) . . . thought he could go to the seminary and study Tibetan Buddhism in a scholarly way without committing himself to the dogma or initiation . . . thought he could simply live his own life there.

Matthews sees the incident as an inevitable clash of two entirely different ethos . . . thinks there was no way to avoid it, though it needn't have taken such a vicious form.

Wm. Matthews (Blair) 6/24/77

"Merwin was at Naropa on the Path. He wasn't here for the poetry scene, that was the last thing he wanted to get involved with. In fact, he always kept a bit of a distance because he sees himself as a loner (in the literary scene) . . . But he was very very generous in terms of the poetry scene because he was here for another ultimate purpose."

Anne Waldman (Santoli) 6/23/77

Merwin & Dana Naone

Merwin and Dana had gotten together just prior to Naropa. Newly connected. Like on their honeymoon. Dana is quite a bit younger than Merwin.

Anne Waldman (Santoli) 6/23/77

Merwin knew he would be treated special as poet laureate of New Yorker — guest star of Trungpa and Trungpa's scene... assured that he wouldn't be "Everyman." Merwin was invited to everything all summer at Naropa.

Merwin had very horny mentality — liked girls a lot — considered himself 'dashing.'

During the summer Merwin and Dana were overcompensating physically.

John Steinbeck IV (Santoli) 6/21/77

Dana was mannerly, from an aristocratic Hawaiian family. She was very happy about being with Bill — "everything is wonderful" — they never fought. She missed Hawaii. She and Bill had recently met in Hawaii. Dana was extremely possessive of Bill and jealous of the possibility of him flirting with other women.

Simone Lazzeri (Santoli) 7/5/77

Merwin got very seriously into the Buddhist practice — meditating diligently and studying. Dana also got into it — Dana is not a frivolous character.

Jim Hartz (Santoli) 6/28/77

Merwin teaches at Naropa

"Merwin was here as a student and prospective Buddhist... and attended poetry classes. Dana was a student in the Visiting Poets Class. Merwin visited and participated out of his own generosity, got paid something but not officially paid like other poets. He told me he wanted to be here as a student rather than Bill Merwin the poet.

"He gave a reading with John Ashbery, two lectures in the Visiting Poets Academy and one special workshop to go over students' works."

Merwin asked Anne how she taught poetry, not believing you can actually teach poetry.

Anne Waldman (Santoli) 6/23/77

Merwin & Dana Naone attend the Trungpa ITS at RMDC following Naropa summer

Merwin and Dana went to the ITS (Intensive Training Seminar) taught by Trungpa at RMDC (Rocky Mt. Dharma Center, Livermore, Colorado) after the Naropa summer ended.

Anne Waldman (Santoli) 6/23/77

"Merwin and Dana had the nicest house at RMDC... Before one of the last ITS Trungpa lectures, Merwin and Dana talked with Jeanine Hughes and I about seminary. Jeanine told Bill and Dana about the claustrophobia of being indoors with all those people... Dana replied, 'But you can always go in your room and lock the door, right?'"

Tom Hast (Santoli) 7/5/77

Trungpa invites Merwin to seminary

"I think they [Merwin and Trungpa] had gotten friendly socially. Merwin had gotten very involved with Trungpa's weekly lectures and being a good student — studying, reading the recommended material, taking notes." Merwin and Dana were sitting regularly.

"...so I really don't know what passed between them (Merwin and Trungpa). I would imagine it was some talk about

poetry, some dharma talk, although at the time Merwin was really a beginning student although I think he was really applying himself and felt ready to jump in, and convinced Trungpa of that, you know, that he was ready for seminary. Just by his eagerness, curiosity, energy, attention, brightness, facility, all those things."

Anne Waldman (Santoli) 6/23/77

A lot of people said good things to Trungpa about Merwin that summer. Trungpa was seemingly more impressed with Merwin than any other of the poets — he didn't invite any other of the poets to the seminary. Trungpa is usually skeptical of poets because of the way they work with ego.

Tom Hast (Santoli) 7/5/77

"Requirements [seminary] are more in the terms of understanding the three Marks of Existence. So it's not purely a question of how long have you been a member of Vajradhatu, but what kind of understanding you have... Really, the fundamental basis is the sense of spiritual materialism. (Which is) 'Am I going to get something out of this?'... The basic criterion for going to the seminary, really, is understanding that that doesn't work, which is the same thing as understanding egolessness and impermanence."

No one quite knows if Merwin and Dana had that understanding. Rinpoche goes through the applications.

Jeremy Hayward (A. Trupp) 6/26/77

"Merwin very much wanted to go to seminary. During the time he was waiting to know he was very anxious, hoping it would work out.

"I don't think he knew what he was getting into (Merwin). And I really think he might have been much better off going to Tassajara and just sitting for a year. He had never done a retreat before he went to the seminary. He had never done a week retreat that I knew of. He was always with his woman, which you kind of put that aside when you go off on an individual retreat and so on. I really don't think he was really ready for the power of the teachings. As a Tantra student I have access to transcripts of that seminary — it's very powerful. Very very powerful material.

"Trungpa is the one to say who's ready for it... Right, he accepted Merwin. Well, maybe this is what's supposed to happen. Part of, ah, Merwin's journey."

Anne Waldman (Santoli) 6/23/77

On learning of his seminary acceptance, Merwin had to rearrange his plans for going back to France.

At a cliff house dinner party, a couple of days after Merwin's seminary acceptance, Dana's unusual nervousness gave Simone the impression that Dana was curious and fearing the seminary.

Simone Lazzeri (Santoli) 7/5/77

"If Dana had not been along, things might have been different for Merwin at the seminary... she wasn't into anything at all except Bill. She was all excited about going to seminary but had absolutely no idea what was involved." Dana wasn't properly taken into account by Trungpa or Merwin in the seminary invitation.

Tom Hast (Santoli) 7/5/77

At the cliff house dinner a couple days after seminary acceptance Merwin said that Trungpa said something to him about giving up private space during the seminary acceptance conversation.

Simone Lazzeri (Santoli) 7/5/77

The Vajradhatu Seminary

The Seminary was held for three months, beginning around Saturday, September 1, 1975, and lasting till around

Thanksgiving, November 27, 1975. It was held at a rented ski lodge (the Eldorado Lodge) in Snowmass, Colorado, located on Route 82, approximately 14 miles northwest of Aspen.

The layout of the lodge and grounds is important in understanding some of the events transpiring at the Seminary.

The ski lodge was located on a hill about three stone's throws from the meditation hall (a converted bar) which lay down the hill from the lodge. Living quarters, the swimming pool, and the room where the Halloween party was later held, all were located at the lodge.

Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, lived at a separate house during the seminary.

Interviews with *Alan Marlowe* 6/26/77
and *Paul Shippee* 6/30/77
(Sanders)

According to an interview with Alan Marlowe, couples without children were housed on the top floor, including William Merwin, and Dana Naone; the middle floors by singles; and the basement by people with children.

General Information about the Seminary

Ron Stubbert was the coordinator of the 1975 Seminary. In an interview with Al Santoli on July 6, 1977, he related the following information about it:

- Cost for seminary was \$550.00.
- The sponsoring group was Vajradhatu.
- Seminarisians came from all over the United States.
- There were 125–130 people in attendance, chosen from around 450–600 applications.
- The seminary involved a great amount of sitting and disciplined study, so that spouses, unless part of the seminary, were discouraged from visiting; although in certain situations outside visitors were allowed.



How were individuals selected for the Seminary?

In an interview with Joshua Zim conducted on June 20, 1977, Zim stated that the final choice of people to attend Seminary was Trungpa, Rinpoche's. The usual qualifications were having previously sat a dathun (30 day sitting period) and taking courses at Naropa or study groups through Karma Dzong. However, the selection process was very subjective on Rinpoche's part, and involved "ripeness" and Rinpoche's "cooking up chemistry" and creating a group process. Zim said persons who were otherwise qualified by study and length of association with Rinpoche might not be selected to attend the seminary because they didn't fit in with the group Rinpoche was creating.

Joshua Zim (Al Sobel) 6/20/77

"... Rinpoche's been working with students for six years, seven years now, and all of us are constantly understanding new complexities and new subtleties of what the student-teacher relationship is, which is extremely central to vajrayana Buddhism and those of us who are Buddhists, and just as of the one hundred and thirty-five (135) persons at Seminary, you'd probably get 135 different understandings and emotional reactions as to what happened..."

William McKeever (La Haye) 6/27/77

"No one was allowed in the seminary... where Rinpoche didn't feel he had enough feeling of what was going on."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

The Course of Study

At the seminary, approximately a month's time each was devoted to Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana study, with Vajrayana study reserved for the concluding month of the seminary.

The schedule involved two weeks of lectures and classes followed by two weeks "where you'd do nothing but sit."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

"The discipline was kept by keeping records publicly posted of how much each person was sitting... attendance was taken six times a day... very boot camp, in that sense, that there was no honor system going on here at all."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

"It's like joining the army. You know what's going on, and you know what you're gonna get, what's going on... You had to sit so many times... pass so many examinations in Hinayana, Mahayana... very structured."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

The Vajradhatu Seminary and perceptions of Merwin on the part of witnesses and friends.

1. Merwin thought he could go to the Seminary and study Tibetan Buddhism in a scholarly way without committing himself to the dogma or initiation... (He) thought he could simply live his own life there.

Interview with *William Matthews* (R. Blair) 6/24/77

2. Merwin has a strong belief in book learning, and western intellectual study, which set him in immediate temperamental opposition to Trungpa's 'crazy wisdom' direct experience. (He) also had a strong belief in the complete privacy of individuals, and of not submitting to external controls. He once turned

down a lucrative teaching job because of his refusal to pledge allegiance to the N.Y. Constitution.

Interview with *William Matthews* (R. Blair) 6/24/77

Merwin and chanting at the Seminary

Merwin gave off a clean, pure image — no meat, no bloody chants. He refused to gekkho because he would not recite the violent chants.

Interview with *Persis McMillen* (Santoli) 7/1/77

"... but the kind of vajrayana chants that we were doing from the beginning, vitality chants that have a good deal of very wrathful images in them — you know, cutting off the heads of people and leaving them to Dharmadhatu... Tibetan vajrayana art... based on compassionate anger, where if you can't subdue your ego then you call upon wisdom to cut the aorta of ego... but everyone knows by then that the violent images are totally the idea of enlightened anger, vajra anger, ... not to totally destroy you, but to only destroy your problem... And that Merwin, in his questions, was constantly talking about God as a reference point and very peace and lighty, you know. He would do the chants that were very peaceful chants... but whenever it came to a chant that had anything... any kind of diety holding a sword in his or her hand... he would make sort of a big point of not doing it... putting his chant down and not chanting."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

William Merwin describes seminary, and the violent chants, and a possible Trungpa grudge

Question 3 (whether Trungpa might have borne a grudge because of anything before the party.) Speculation on Trungpa's state of mind, I think, is unlikely to lead very far. Doubly so since much of the information that he had about those studying at the seminary apparently was carried to him by confidants, his guards in particular. But at our one private meeting with him before the party, we had spoken of our objections to the blood-thirsty nature of some of the chants, and more particularly to his increasingly frequent and heavy sneers at other religious and contemplative traditions. We said that the attitude he was expressing toward other traditions was making us less and less open to the idea of taking vows with him. Incidentally, we were only in a limited sense students of Trungpa's. We had read his books and seminary transcripts, listened to tapes, and attended his lectures during the summer, and before seminary I had had one short interview with him. But we were members of no group in his organizations, had taken no vows at all with him, had made no promises to obey him. On the few occasions at which we'd spoken with Trungpa socially, during the summer, and at the one meeting with him at seminary before the party (and even at the one after it) we seemed to be able to speak together directly, relatively openly, and with good feeling; when he referred to the same subjects later, in public, his tone and manner were in sharp contrast with the way he talked with us in private.

William S. Merwin, letter to Pope, Pickering, and Trupp
7/20/77

Concerning the so-called Vajra Guards

According to several interviews, the Vajrayana Security Guards had not been formally constituted at the time of the 1975 Seminary. There is some indication (interview with Alan Marlowe on 6/26/77) that events transpiring at the Seminary may have been a factor in the formal organizing of the guards.

According to an interview with *Persis McMillen* (Santoli, 7/1/77) the idea of "guards" at the seminary bothered Bill

Merwin and others a lot: that a built-in power structure can appear, on its surface, to be a totalitarian venture.

"People would volunteer... There would always be a... a guard is kind of a loaded name... loaded word. People would volunteer to keep watch over Rinpoche's house, so nobody would break in; so he wouldn't be disturbed by any crazy people around, which there were a few... Someone... a snowman at Aspen... been known to harass in the past... 1975.

"People volunteered, not specifically for that — it was more out of devotion, friendliness with Rinpoche, to take some kind of delight in being in his house, letting people in, letting people out, that kind of thing. Also... when he entertained."

Interview with *Richard Assally* (Faigao) 5/27/77

Merwin and Dana at the Seminary

"If one of them was sick, the other one would stay home. If one of them had kitchen duty, the other one would just do it anyway. So, they would be together... They were never apart, and when they were together, they were always entwined in some absurd physical contortion... it was actually a joke."

Interview with *Barbara Meier* (Faigao) 6/29/77

"The main point was: Seminary is the kind of experience where everything is shaken up. Bill's reaction was to make himself even more solid in terms of his relationship to things. Bill's (goal) was to grow... to sort of drown himself in this thing... but he was also holding back. They [he and Dana] had their meals in their room... Up to the point of the party he was fairly comfortable... but his participation was not that... I mean of all people there he was probably the most out of it."

Interview with *David Bolduc* (McCabe) 6/24/77

"Merwin had his very definite lifestyle, which included, for instance (at Zendo-like dinner in shrine room), he would have Dana wait on him... She would go up and get his food and kind of serve it to him, sort of very, you know, slave-like."

Interview with *Jack Niland* (Santoli) 6/23/77

The Pea Shooters

Allegations had been made that Trungpa, Rinpoche had, on occasion, shot people with peas through a pea shooter, during the early parts of the seminary; and that at some point had issued peas, peashooters, and goggles to his guards.

According to an interview with *Paul Shippee* (Sanders, 6/30/77) on one occasion a guard zapped Alan Marlowe in the eye with a pea, and Marlowe punched the guard out.

The Talk on Discipline

"What happened was that oddly enough Rinpoche thought we were all being too good... trying too hard, and that was very suspicious."

It was in the middle of Mahayana study, about halfway through the seminary, when there was a meeting called for the lecture hall down the hill from the hotel.

"Absolute total attendance was required... roll call... The hotel was emptied. Then we were told that Rinpoche decided to cancel his talk on discipline."

Rinpoche was playing "an enormous practical joke on us."

The guards were outside, with "a huge stockpile of snowballs and peashooters..." which "bombarded us."

"Everyone had a sack of peas, and it was like blasting your way back into the hotel... It really got carried away... squirting fire hoses up and down the hotel. People were shoveling snow into the hotel, as we took over floor by floor... It was just like being kids... Well, unfortunately, it got a little serious and people got genuinely pissed off."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77



The snowball fight, the Toyota packed with snow, and the incidents between Trungpa's guards and the seminarians.

Regarding the night of the snowball fight (Ron Barnstone, one of the guards, objected in interview [Blair, 6/24/77] to calling incident a "snowball fight"), Alan Marlowe said that everybody was required to attend a lecture in the hall (the converted bar) down the hill from the lodge. The lecture was scheduled for 4:30 in the afternoon. Whereas, though, Trungpa is often late for lectures, it became apparent after a wait on this occasion of about one and one-half hours, that he was not going to show up, so people began leaving. When they left the lecture hall, they noted that the hotel up the hill was manned by snowball-hurling guards, on the roof and on the balconies.

Alan Marlowe (Sanders) 6/26/77

There were also guards "armed" with pea shooters outside the lecture hall, and apparently they spat dried legumes at the exiting seminarians, through plastic tubes.

Interview with Paul Shippee (Sanders) 6/30/77

Sides were quickly drawn. "We moved up the hill. They were throwing snowballs from the roof, and from the balconies," said Alan Marlowe. Marlowe felt that Trungpa wanted them to respond to the attack with maximum efficiency, so he led a small group that attempted to break into Trungpa's room. (Trungpa apparently was in a room on the top floor of the lodge.) Marlowe relates that he managed to get his arm inside Rinpoche's door, but that his cohorts waxed hesitant at that critical moment, and that his arm was thereupon nearly broken.

Alan Marlowe (Sanders) 6/26/77

Rinpoche apparently offered himself upon a balcony as a snowball target. "... Rinpoche was standing up there on the balcony like this general leading his troops... Rinpoche to me was setting himself up as a target, 'cause he stayed on that balcony... iceballs... and he let everyone throw snowballs at him... Rinpoche undermining our tight little concept of discipline."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

Marlowe related that they had Rinpoche trapped on the top floor; he mentioned turning off the elevator buttons, and that the only exits were a couple of staircases. The staircases were being patrolled by people with fire hoses, who had in mind spraying Trungpa and guards with water.

Trungpa finally left the building and managed to get into his car, a Toyota owned by a couple attending the seminary, (Marty and Jane Janowitz [phonetic], Marlowe 6/26/77), one who was his driver, and one who was cooking for him. The Toyota, with Trungpa inside, was spritzed, with the result that water froze all over it. They then rocked the car back and forth, as if to overturn it, but relented, and Trungpa was borne away.

Interview with Alan Marlowe (Sanders) 6/26/77

Marlowe said that Merwin was assisting with the fire hoses.

Interview with Alan Marlowe (Sanders) 6/26/77

Blocking Rinpoche's car

"... People immediately went and sort of blocked Rinpoche's car and then the guards came and took the cars that were blocking and pushed them into a gully...."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

Retributive Plans and Plots

"... In the room, we're all goofing around on the idea of Paris Underground, getting code words, and now and then we'd say, 'oh, he's a spy (for Trungpa)' — and it was all like this WW II espionage trip; and to see Merwin totally behind this, who was so uptight before, and wouldn't chant the violent chants, was just concerned about replanting flowers and recycling garbage... He had so many crazy ideas about revenge, and I said, you know, he's not quite the ivory tower poet he pretends to be..."

One of the ideas Niland recalls Merwin had, was to manufacture nitrous oxide, apparently for the purpose of zapping Trungpa during a lecture. "Merwin," he recalled, "was trying to definitely organize people to go into town to get these chemicals... I just said, oh forget it, I'm just gonna go downstairs and get drunk... that's chemical warfare, man... but he knew how to make laughing gas... And he was talking about a lot of other very preposterous schemes, most of which I've forgotten — the only one I can think of was a weather balloon or something."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

"... Merwin was in this room... and he was planning these wild things... he said that he knew how to make some kind of laughing gas... we could go to Denver... combine certain chemicals to make laughing gas... and then there was all this talk about really getting back at Rinpoche, going over and trashing out his house and everything..."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

The Trash-out of Trungpa's House and the delivery of the pizzas

On the night of the snowball fight, Marlowe was in the group that ordered various deliveries to be made to Trungpa's house.

He ordered 300 dollars worth of champagne and expensive alcoholic beverages to be delivered. They also called the fire department, the gas and electric company, and various pizzerias and taxi services, ordering deliveries; the aim being a batch of deliveries and arrivals around the same time.

Marlowe confirmed that while Trungpa was trapped in the hotel, his house was entered, and his clothing was removed, and his liquor. When Trungpa's possessions were finally returned, and his quarters were being straightened, that's when all the pizzas, liquor, taxis, et al., began arriving.

Alan Marlowe (Sanders) 6/26/77

Other allegations have been made that Trungpa's automobile was totally filled with snow.

The peashooter/snowball/trash-out of Trungpa's house/confrontation took place approximately two weeks prior to the Halloween party, which is the subject of this examination. "It felt like a couple of weeks (later) . . . everything had completely calmed down; everyone had completely forgotten about it — time went by (chuckle) and we're in the middle of a sitting period (just before Halloween)."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

"One day during a lecture someone asked Kalu Rinpoche why lamas aren't like Marpa anymore, beating their disciples, giving them horrendous tasks to fulfill. He said these days the disciples' faith isn't strong enough. They would think that the lama was bad, maybe call the police if the lama beat them. Then he laughed."

Darjeeling Journal article by Bryan Miller in LOKA 2.

Concerning "Night Porter"

"Jack (Niland) had seen it in N.Y. . . . and said, 'oh, we all have to go,' and *he* organized essentially just through his chatter in the lounge; he created this whole environment where everybody was anxious to go to it."

Barbara Meier (Bataan Faigao) 6/29/77

Barbara Meier was asked how many seminarians had attended the movie. She replied, "I would say — couple of dozen. I don't think Rinpoche went to that. He went and saw "Chinatown."

The Halloween Party 10/31/75

"The set-up of the Halloween party took us all totally by surprise, because it was the middle of a sitting period. Halloween fell in the middle of a week's sitting, so we just assumed that we weren't going to have a Halloween party. So the word came out that Rinpoche ordered us to have a Halloween party; nobody was particularly into it."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

Ron Barnstone was asked whether Rinpoche called the Halloween party. Barnstone responded: "That's just bullshit." Rinpoche did not call the party. . . . It was a spontaneous Halloween party . . . though some people had been preparing costumes. . . .

Ron Barnstone (R. Blair) 6/24/77

Some people went into town to see "Night Porter" on their own accord a few nights before the Halloween party. Some people made jokes about it after the Merwin incident occurred.

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/27/77

"It came out that the end of this sitting period we were going to have Vajrayana (they had gone through Hinayana and Mahayana). So . . . Rinpoche . . . not only did he command to

have a Halloween party, but he also commanded that every one attend and wear a costume. It was very definitely set up as a kind of pre-Vajrayana feast, because the idea of Halloween, with all these bizarre costumes, and putting on masks, — it's kind of like admitting your neurosis — like, who you come as. Halloween, on our scene, has been . . . adopted as our Tantric holiday; because there's so many contradictions in it; the idea of unmasking and putting on masks, and dressing up; it's kind of getting totally Samsaric, in other words.

"Vajrayana has a good deal to do with totally connecting with Samsara. So, the word was out, and everyone was *quite* shocked that we were going to have a party, that Rinpoche announced he was going to attend, that there was going to be very formal — that Rinpoche had something in mind; that he wanted to have kind of a 'courtlife' atmosphere, and that every(one) had to wear a costume.

"So there was a good deal of problem, . . . because no one could go to town to buy a costume, because we weren't allowed to go to town then, even though a bunch of people snuck off and bought wigs and funny things.

"And the other problem was how can we get ready for it, because we had to sit right up to five o'clock (the evening of the party)."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

For another version, Barbara Meier was asked by Bataan Faigao if Rinpoche announced there was to be a party. She replied, "No, there was nothing; there was no announcement. . . . All I knew was the year before there'd been a Halloween party. And it was in the middle of Ninthum (sitting) too; it wasn't during the study part at all. . . . I did know that everybody was going into Aspen to get a costume, or making a costume. Everyone was working on one, everybody knows that everyone was doing it . . . I had to clean the shrine room that night, so I arrived late, but I put my costume on first, and then went. And people were doing incredibly elaborate things: building boxes and things. Some people spent a lot of money, and a lot of time, and a lot of energy on their trips."

"It was just some sense of it being a tradition, and that we were totally claustrophobic; we'd been sitting all too long; we'd been all holed up in this place together much too long; we wanted a *real* blow-out. . . . I remember sitting in the lounge, and it was just like a fashion show; people would walk by around the balcony."

Interview with Barbara Meier (Bataan Faigao) 6/29/77

"Everyone spent a lot of time on costumes. I spent a good deal of the day painting peaceful and wrathful deities (on two people's bodies) with their cocks as tongues."

Interview with artist Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

Merwin's recollections of parties at the seminary and of early events at the Halloween Party.

Questions 4, 5, 6, 8. Concerning the incident itself. Robert's got the sequence wrong — and the nature of the liquid Trungpa threw in my face.

In the days after the Hallowe'en happenings, we both wrote detailed accounts of what we remembered, and have them here.

We were at the seminary on an odd footing, in the first place. At a social meeting, in Boulder, during the previous summer, we'd said to Trungpa that we would like to continue to study Buddhism in the autumn, at his seminary, which we knew about through Allen and other friends. Trungpa had said that the fall list was already full, but that if openings occurred he'd put us in. Later we were informed that we'd been admitted, but were asked to say nothing about it until seminary itself, because we'd been put in over a long waiting list, at Trungpa's own decision. So we felt that we'd been accorded a privilege — which came to

seem an awkward one. One of the assumptions of the seminary was a much older involvement with Trungpa and his methods, and a far less questioning commitment to them, than we, in fact, had.

I don't know of other public incidents of sexual or other violence, apart from the snowball happening. There'd been two other parties before the one on Hallowe'en — official parties, anyway. It had become a tradition to have such parties, blow-outs, before the few days off, after a period of some days of sitting practice. We'd left the other two parties early. There were many rumors of sexual activities, all sorts of partner-changing, at the seminary. That, and drinking, were both said to be encouraged as part of the teaching, though I have to say that Trungpa had never personally spoken to us on the subject. Dana never drinks; I drink along with friends I'm happy to be with, but not much. At the parties we danced together and went home together — real squares. But not unique, there: other couples at the seminary did the same.

The Hallowe'en party had been a topic for some weeks beforehand, including doubts as to whether there would be an official party at all, or not. Big deal, anyway. There had also been a build-up about the heaviness of the Tantric teachings that were about to descend on us through the medium of Trungpa, and blow all our minds.

I had been in bed for several days before the party with an allergy attack, but got up to go to it, for a while, at least. Semi-dark ski-lodge dining room: a unit of recent boom-resort architecture, by then much the worse for two months of seminary. We danced to records for an hour or so; stayed together despite several attempts, one of them pretty drunk, to separate us. Trungpa arrived around 10:30, looking baleful. Butch haircut. Flanked by guards — fortunately, because he was very drunk, and they caught him twice, when he fell. He whispered with the guards. Something was said to be brewing: one of the secrets he'd been preparing. A few minutes later a woman student in her sixties was borne in, naked, held high by guards. She let them carry her around the room, then struggled to be let down. Finally she was released, and ran out. Trungpa giggled, did a strip tease, was carried around, in turn. Dressed again.

Wm. Merwin, letter to Pope, Trupp, and Pickering, 7/20/77

The ecdisis of Persis McMillen

Persis McMillen was one of those first stripped at the Halloween party. Early in the evening Persis met Trungpa and he told her that he was going to take off people's clothes. She thought he was kidding, didn't take it very seriously. After talking to her, Trungpa disappeared for an extended period of time.

Interview with Persis McMillen (Santoli) 7/1/77

Regarding the actual stripping, Persis McMillen recalled, "It happened so fast." She remembers the guards surrounding her, and it took them two minutes to take off her clothes. She was shocked; she didn't resist. The guards hoisted her while nude, aloft. Being a dancer, at first she took a poised dance pose, but after a few seconds felt differently; felt, in her words, "really trashed out." She ran upstairs. In her own words, she "felt sick," and "literally stripped," and "... very, very upsetting."

Interview with Persis McMillen (Santoli) 7/1/77

After she went upstairs, Persis McMillen later put on her longest dress and came back down to the party.

Interview with Persis McMillen (Santoli) 7/1/77

Alan Marlowe pointed out that Rinpoche was "in the process of stripping everybody" when the issue of Merwin coming down to the party came up, so, in that context, Merwin was not singled out for ecdisis.

Interview with Alan Marlowe (Sanders) 6/26/77

"This stuff was happening with Persis McMillen. They were passing her around, and somebody else, I can't remember... They took off all her clothes and they were passing her around."

Barbara Meier (Faigao) 6/29/77

The ecdisis of Trungpa, Rinpoche

According to an interview with Alan Marlowe, Trungpa himself was nude for a while, apparently early in the party. Marlowe, it will be recalled, came nude to the party in the first place. Marlowe mentioned that he, Marlowe, was wearing Persis McMillen's red scarf tied around his membrum virile, while he and a woman named Diane Moberg lifted the nude Trungpa upon their shoulders.

Interview with Alan Marlowe (Sanders) 6/26/77

Trungpa earlier in the evening was carried nude over people's heads.

Interview with Richard Assally (Faigao and Santoli) 6/27/77

The ecdisis of Jack Niland

Jack Niland relates that he came to the party dressed as Enlightenment, wrapped in aluminum foil, with a burning candle atop his head. His costume tended to cause him to heat up, so, prior to the arrival of Trungpa, Niland removed it, and was sitting in the lobby by the fire. Then Trungpa arrived.

"All of a sudden Rinpoche walks in; and he walks in like Vajra Cop — he walks in with four guards... He looked at me, and said, 'You're not wearing a costume.'"

"I'm sitting there (in the lobby) and all of a sudden I see this woman (Persis McMillen) come running out of the dining room stark naked... She was giggling like mad... Then a few other people came out and said, 'hey, somebody else is naked in there...'"

"Then Rinpoche comes down the hallway again, and he said, 'Jack, you're not wearing a costume.' And I said, 'I told you Rinpoche, I had this great costume, and you missed it. It got too hot and I took it off.'... He said, 'As long as you're not going to wear a costume, you're really not going to wear a costume. I have this great costume for you.' He said, 'Boys, do it,' and these four boys came over and grabbed me, and started to unbutton my clothes. I said, 'Wait a minute, what's going on?'"

"... Then I said, wait a minute, this is a unique experience... The only way to combat something like this is to go overboard into — more than other people want you to. So I said, 'Wait a minute; you're not going to take my clothes off; I'm going to do a strip tease in the lobby... I command you all to pick me up and take me into the dining room,' which was what they had in mind anyway.

"So the four guys pick me up, and they proceed to race me into the dining room... They were bored because I wasn't resisting... They finally just grabbed me and took me outside and threw me in the pool, which luckily was heated. All these people kept coming out and kidding me... and I would reach up and pull them into the pool. So, there were people with wigs on and these costumes, in the pool, and everyone was just going crazy."

Interview with Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

After Trungpa arrives at the party

"I had a whole interchange with Rinpoche. I can't remember the order. I think it must have happened before... He called me up to him. He saw me, and... we got into this whole thing. He was picking up on my costume. The whole aggression. (She was in costume as a biker.) We started sort of like making out. I mean it was very lavish, and all these people were dancing, and sitting around (laughs), and we just started doing this whole thing. And he was being so brutal. He was being so physically brutal,

and like, clawing my arm, and just, biting my lip, just so vicious. And then he did this whole thing with my cheek (bit into the skin, leaving tooth marks), and I was in this state of mind — well, if that's what he wants, that's what I'll give him too. And I just came back with it. And we're in this intense, you know (makes unh-ing sound) like this you know, very tense, very, very tense. . . . Somebody else came up or something and I managed to get away. But it was very nonverbal, direct, powerful, intense brutal communication. I didn't know what to make of it at all."

Interview with *Barbara Meier* (Faigao) 6/29/77

The Party and Vajra Feast Tradition

"They were just having a ball. It was this dynamite party; fantastic costumes. And then Rinpoche shows up and said he wanted to give us a talk about Vajrayana. And unmasking, and the idea of dancing and the vajra master. There's a very famous thing about vajra feasts in the old days in Tibet — thousands upon thousands of people would have it in cemeteries . . . and he was just having a mini-version of this.

"It's sort of a challenge to how enlightened or cool you are — that you can get totally drunk and still know what you're doing. It's a very definite Tantric teaching that you can get as drunk as you want; you can still do it with dignity and awareness. That was a kind of teaching — that you have to be able to handle the wildest kind of energy and still maintain your awareness."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

"Is everybody here?"

" . . . Rinpoche sat down, very dark room; this plate glass picture window is behind him, starry sky, snowy, moonlit landscape of snow — very beautiful. . . . It started out simply, (Rinpoche) saying he wanted to give us a little talk, congratulate us all, talk about becoming a Vajrayana; and then he started saying, 'is everyone here?' . . . Well, so and so isn't here. 'Knock on the door; go get them. . . .' Very simple.

"Then it got down to 'who else isn't here?' — 'Well, I noticed the Merwins (sic) aren't here.' 'All right, knock on the door; say that Rinpoche has invited you to the Vajra Dance, to the Vajra Feast . . .' It should be the ultimate privilege in our lifetime to go to something like this. . . ."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

Demands from Trungpa for Merwin and Naone to come back to the Party.

We got ready for bed. Knock on the door. McKeaver (whom neither of us knew) saying that Rinpoche wanted us to come to the party. We talked it over, and answered that we'd been there, and now were going to bed. He said Rinpoche wanted to talk with us. We repeated that we were going to bed, and suggested that talking could wait until the next day. McKeaver insisted. Neither of us wanted to go down, but we said ok, we'd come. He left. We dressed and went down, peered in at the door, and thought it looked as bad as ever. We had no more wish to stay than before, and we went upstairs again. We thought they might not leave it at that, in the mood that seemed to prevail in the dining room, and that we'd do better to drive into town. As we were getting ready to go, another knock at the door. This time it was an order to come down. We said we'd been, and weren't coming down again. The pause that followed was full of McKeaver's shock. As he left I looked down the hall after him and saw heads peering around the corner. Guards, I suppose, or eager spectators, or both. McKeaver came back to say he had orders to take us down. We had locked the door, then, and I locked the big glass door onto the balcony. A crowd could be heard in the hall. Then threats began: they were going to break down the door if we didn't open it, and come in and get us, etc.



Attempts at the lock, and at persuasion at the same time. 'Why didn't we want to come down?' We said we could see no reason to come down when neither of us wanted to. Laughs; jeers. The hall evidently pretty crowded. More threats. Who did I think I was, setting myself up to protect Dana? Sound of pass-keys being inserted. I held the button locked. Kicks and battering at the door. We moved a long chest of drawers against it — the only piece of furniture that was much to the purpose. The telephones, by the way, had been disconnected in the rooms.

Figures appeared on the balcony, tried the glass door. We turned off the lights. Then a long session of alternate and mixed threats and coaxing us to open up, come down, "get it over with" — the overall tone menacing, angry, contemptuous. I said that we didn't mean to open the door to them; that there were only two of us, and heaven knew how many of them, and that if they did break the door down to come in and get us, I would hurt the first ones in, if I could. There was a case of empty beer bottles in the bathroom, near the door. Loring Palmer, a former student of Suzuki Roshi's, and a friend, came to the door and asked me to let him in, to talk about it. I said I couldn't, with that crowd behind him. I begged him to keep out of it. Carl Springer, a Naropa director (whom we didn't know) came and pled at the door, very emotional, saying that he was our friend, and that this was our last chance; urging us to open the door for him (and the crowd) and come down.

from letter, *W.S. Merwin* to Trupp, Pickering, Pope, 7/20/77

Negotiations

Alan Marlowe recalls that negotiations with Merwin and Dana to get them to come to the party began circa 9 p.m., and went on and on, maybe for a couple of hours, with the stripping incident not occurring until around midnight.

Interview with *Alan Marlowe* (Sanders) 6/23/77

"Oh, Merwin says that he's very tired and he and Dana would like to go to sleep so they can get up early the next morning and sit. Rinpoche saying, would you please tell them the Vajra Master has extended an invitation to Mr. Merwin to attend the Vajra Dance . . .

"Merwin says that he's definitely gone to sleep, and he definitely was at the dance; there's no reason for coming back, and he's already in bed, and that's it.

"Rinpoche going back and saying that this is part of the thing, and he's not only requested, he's sort of required to come . . . that Rinpoche wants him there.

"Coming back down; Merwin: Rinpoche cannot tell him when he goes to bed; Rinpoche can tell him when to sit, and when to study, but no one is going to tell him when to go to bed . . .

"Then things got heavier and heavier. Rinpoche would start out by giving a talk, saying, 'I really admire Merwin's poetry, and I'm a great fan of his, and I think he's doing really well, but there's a certain kind of resistance going on, and he's under the idea that he wants to study Vajrayana and he really wants to practice Buddhism, and I want you to realize that I'm really going to insist that Merwin come down here no matter what, or what it takes.'

" . . . Everyone was getting very tired by then; it was getting late, around midnight. People were exhausted, drunk . . . My own particular take was, God, Merwin, the worst that could happen is you get your clothes taken off. . . 'OK, tell Merwin we're going to break down the door if he doesn't want to come down.

" . . . And no one wanted to do it; nobody wanted to do it. No one knows how to break down a door. And then . . . loads of people are saying, 'Drop it, Rinpoche.'"

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

"This one guard in particular [Ron Barnstone] . . . people were worried about breaking the door because it had been bad enough trashing out the hotel with the fire hoses (the night of the snowball fight) . . . people started really freaking out. What is Rinpoche trying to do? . . . endless discussion . . . if you guys want to stay here and study vajrayana you have to attend, or split immediately. Rinpoche saying, 'I want that door broken down.'"

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

The Breaking-in of Bill Merwin's and Dana Naone's door

"They went down and told Rinpoche, 'Merwin's barricaded himself and there is no way to break down the door, can't we drop it?' Rinpoche says, 'Break through the plate glass window' . . . So the guards . . . decided to simultaneously break through the door and enter the plate glass window."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

In an interview, Randy Blair asked Ron Barnstone about Niland's story that Barnstone may have intervened with Rinpoche, asking him not to order Merwin's door broken down. Barnstone laughed, and said, "No, that's not true."

Interview with Ron Barnstone (Blair) 6/24/77

"All these tough guys trying to decide who's going to do it. So finally they decided on a plan of action. Merwin had a balcony. It was a three or four foot leap from the next balcony. People said, we'll never be able to break down this door, so let's leap over there and see if we can get through the sliding glass door . . . They could see through the sliding glass door that not only had Merwin locked it, but he had barricaded himself in the room with huge amounts of furniture piled against the door."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

The Glass Storm

"David Darwent — he was the person who broke in through the glass window — it was three stories up, and he climbs over, broke the window . . . This whole thing about a 'glass storm.' I remember that vision, that image, very powerful — A rain, a rain of glass, shattered glass."

Interview with Barbara Meier (Faigao) 6/29/77

" . . . The first guy to break through the plate glass window [David Darwent] throws a chair through it and cuts himself up."

" . . . People were worried about breaking the door, because it had been bad enough trashing out the hotel with the fire hoses. . . . People started really freaking out — What is Rinpoche trying to do? . . . Endless discussion . . . 'If you guys want to stay here and study Vajrayana, you have to attend, or split immediately.' Rinpoche saying, 'I want that door broken down.'"

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

William S. Merwin cuts some faces

Although a long time member of the American pacifist community, Merwin, striking with beer bottles, caused them to break, and cut several people who were entering his room, creating wounds, one of which reportedly required 18 stitches, and the other 12, to close.

"Loring [Palmer, the first to enter] was this totally gentle guy, ex-Zenny ya know, just the most gentle guy in the world, I mean just so sweet . . . He was the cook there, into organic foods, and he went and tried to have a long talk . . . So once the door was broken down, the furniture pushed aside, Loring was the first one in; luckily the first two guys in wore glasses, cause Merwin came out with a broken beer bottle and went straight for their eyes. Loring got some really bad cuts."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

"Loring gets cut up, and Loring was on the trip of 'hey, I'm your friend!' and he just got cut, really badly around the eye, chin, cheek, and this guy is one of these guys that's very delicate looking, so it really shows up."

Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

"The next guy in, after Loring, was this very macho guy that prides himself on his karate knowledge, Ron Barnstone. So he went charging in . . . So Barnstone got cut as if the beer bottle went around the eye like he was aiming so exactly, you know; the circle went like this. If he'd been an inch off, someone would have been eyeless, but he was so exact in his aim."

Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

After entering the room

"When I went into the room, he was quite berserk and came at me with a broken beer bottle, and I said again, sort of to indicate where the aggression was coming from, I just stood there and I said, 'Bill, I'm your friend. Why don't you come down?' And he said, just kind of went berserk . . . And I said, 'If you're going to hit me, go ahead.' And he stopped for a minute, but then a minute later he gave me a good punch in the eye. And I had a black eye for a while."

Interview with William McKeever (LaHaye) 6/27/77

"So apparently they just grabbed him and the word got back that Rinpoche had sent out the word . . . that Merwin was not to be harmed at all, because by then people were getting pissed. And the word was out that no matter what Merwin does to anyone, he is not to be harmed, except for physically subduing him. So, by then the guys charged in — the story we were getting

back was that Merwin, ya know, they got the beer bottle out of his hand, and a bunch of guys grabbed him and did a hammerlock on him. He started ranting and raving that he basically was trying to protect his girl friend, and that became his central theme . . . ”

Interview with *Jack Niland* (Santoli) 6/23/77

“He (Merwin) did say that when he saw the blood dripping out of Loring’s eye, he realized that he had to [inaudible — let go of?] something but it was only in as much as he would go downstairs, and stop putting up a fight.”

Interview with *Barbara Meier* (Faigao) 6/29/77

At the party while waiting for the couple to be brought down

“ . . . And then Rinpoche went into the thing, before Merwin got down, about this is obviously Vajrayana — the idea here is to unmask. Before we study Vajrayana we have to be willing to expose every bit of our neurosis . . . and it’s all very symbolic and obvious; that exposing yourself sometimes means literally doing it, and that you can’t hope to deal with your neuroses if you’re not going to admit them to anyone . . . ”

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

Breaking, Cutting, Resisting, Surrendering

Then someone announced, with satisfaction, that Rinpoche had sent an order to bring us down “at any cost”. Evidently it was just what some had been waiting for. They started to smash at the door in unison with something heavy; I never saw what it was, but I’d heard something earlier about getting a beam from somewhere. We pushed as hard as we could, but finally the lock (a brass knob) was forced through the wood, and that door gave way. As the first hand came through I hit it with a bottle, and as the opening widened I reached around and struck down, hitting something I couldn’t see. The bottle broke. I passed the broken top of it to my left hand, took another, reached through and struck downward again, not seeing who or what I was hitting at, and again the bottle broke. At that point Dana shrieked, and there was a loud crashing as the big glass balcony door was smashed, by McKeever, among others, with another heavy object — a large rock, I think. It was taken away afterwards before I had a chance to look closely. I crossed the room and started to beat the remnants of the glass door outward onto the balcony, pushing with the broken bottles, but meanwhile the crowd forced its way into the room behind us, from the hall. Dana was shouting, “Police! why doesn’t somebody call the police?” but they laughed at her, women too, and Trungpa later mocked her, for that, in one of his lectures.

They surrounded us. Dana was backed into a corner. They kept away from the broken bottles I was holding out. It was then that McKeever asked if I wanted to kill him. As I remember, my answer was to tell him to keep his distance. If I’d “gone berserk”, or hit him, as he claims, he’d probably have scars. The way he’d just made his way into the room, for one thing, would seem inconsistent with his statement that “all physical damage” was my doing. If he told me at that moment that he was my friend, as he says he did, I may not have taken the statement very seriously. Another disciple of Trungpa’s, Richard Assally (?), was trying to edge along the wall toward Dana, meanwhile coaxing us both, sentimentally, to come and “dance with the energies” — a phrase that was getting a lot of use.

It was at this point that they led my (in fact) friend Loring up in front of me, and I saw that his face had been cut by a bottle at the door, and was streaming blood. At the sight, I suddenly felt helpless, put my arms out, and let them take the bottles. They bent my arms back and piled onto me, and as they did, Dana started to fight. It was she who dealt out the black eye — or eyes. (We thought there was only one: a tall man named Hirsch.

Neither of us remembers that McKeever got one. Oh well.)
W.S. Merwin, letter to Pope, Pickering, and Trupp, 7-20-77

Were Bill Merwin and Dana Naone dragged downstairs to the party?

Randy Blair asked guard Ron Barnstone if the couple were dragged downstairs. Barnstone replied that they went under their own power.

Interview with *Ron Barnstone* (Blair) 6/24/77

Persis McMillen said that Merwin and Dana were definitely dragged down.

Interview with *Persis McMillen* (Santoli) 7/1/77

What was Trungpa’s costume?

“At this point you and I are in costume. He wore what he usually was wearing . . . At this time this was jeans, and suspenders, and a checkered flannel shirt.”

Interview with *Richard Assally* (Faigao) 6/27/77

Tableau for the Confrontation

“Here’s Rinpoche, here’s the other door, and they brought them in like this. Merwin and Dana are standing here like this and I was right here . . . Maybe like three people between me and Rinpoche. And then this whole crowd of people like this. I felt almost very ‘on stage’ myself. And the other stairway was over here. I can remember feeling — had *no* idea what was going on, I had *no* idea. I got a whiff of Rinpoche’s power, and I



realized that like *anything* could happen, *anything*. And my mind started going crazy. I started having, like, hallucinations in terms of what *could* happen. Meanwhile, this is all going just more and more intense.

"And Merwin's calling Rinpoche names. Like, I think even names like 'charlatan' and 'why do you have to drag people out of their rooms — what is this — who do you think you are — I don't have to — you're not my teacher, you're not my guru.' Meanwhile, Dana is screaming, and I responded much more powerfully to her than to him."

Interview with *Barbara Meier* (Faigao) 6/29/77

Dana Naone describes being brought down

"... We were let up, and walked down to the dining hall escorted by guards.

"Everyone in the dining hall (a number of people had gone to bed earlier) was ranged in a semi-circle around Trungpa. As we entered the circle, I said they were all "a bunch of cowards." There was a terrific argument with Trungpa — angry and heated, though neither of us shouted. He said we had not accepted his invitation, and talked about our aggressions and violent acts."

Dana Naone, letter dated July 25, 1977, to Trupp, Pickering, Tom Pope

The Putative Orientality Rap

Allegations have been made that Trungpa spoke to Dana, when she was brought before him, of her orientality.

"Rinpoche talking to Dana, said, 'You're oriental; you're smarter than this. You might be playing slave to this white man but you and I know where it's at. We're both oriental... we know where it's at.' Then he started to talk about 'my country

being ripped out from under me, and it was the Chinese communists who did it... If there's one thing I want to see in my lifetime, it's to see my country back. Only one oriental to another can understand that.' He said, 'I know your background, Dana...' He kept doing this super racist thing... very cutting, and her only response was, 'You're a Nazi, you're a Nazi,' and 'Someone call the police.' She was completely freaking out."

Interview with *Jack Niland* (Santoli) 6/23/77

Trungpa told Dana that he wanted Tibet back. In an interview Persis McMillen stated she had the feeling Trungpa was saying 'you are oriental, you shouldn't be opposing...' in "seductive manner."

Interview with *Persis McMillen* (Santoli) 7/1/77

"He started commenting on her orientality."

Interview with *Paul Shippee* (Sanders) 6/30/77

Dana Naone remembers the rap

"William characterized his use of guards and physical force as fascistic; "What about the people who instigate wars?" I asked. His response was the Chinese communists had ripped off his country, and he wanted to rip off theirs. Leaning forward, over me (he was seated in a chair, and we were sitting on the floor in front of him), he said that he and I understood each other, and could talk to each other, but that William was a white man. We had something between us because of our ancestry, which excluded William, he repeated, and I felt he was trying to use that as a seductive argument to divide William and me. I told him that he was barking up the wrong tree. Several times we were asked, 'What's your secret?' 'No secret,' we said."

Dana Naone, letter dated July 25, 1977 to Trupp, Pickering, and Pope.

W.S. Merwin recalls being taken down to the Party, the orientality rap, the "lion's mouth" discussion, and a brief exchange regarding fascism, plus the stripping.

They piled onto Dana, too, until someone, probably Tom Reikan, told them to lay off, and they let us go. We said we'd go down by ourselves, if they kept their hands off us. Tom told us they would, and we went down. The hall was crowded with onlookers. Dana shouted again, "Why doesn't somebody call the police?" One of the women insulted her, told her to shut up. One of the male disciples threw a glass of wine in her face. I didn't see it, and she said nothing about it until afterwards.

In the dining-room, Trungpa seated in a chair; a ring of subdued party-goers sitting on the floor. As we walked in, Dana looked around and said loudly, "You're all a bunch of cowards."

Trungpa called us to come over in front of him, looked up at me, and said, "I hear you've been making a lot of trouble." Grabbed my free hand to try to force me down, saying, "Sit down." (The other hand had been bleeding a lot and was wrapped in a towel.) When he let go, we sat down on the floor. He said we hadn't accepted his invitation. I said that if we *had* to accept it it wasn't an invitation. He insisted that it was an invitation. An invitation, I said, allowed the other person the privilege of declining. We pushed that around a bit. The way he saw it, no force seemed to have been used, except by us. I reminded him that we'd never promised to obey him. He said, "Ah, but you asked to come." Then, dramatically, "Into the lion's mouth!" I said they'd developed big corkscrews, new, for forcing coyotes out of their burrows, and that maybe he ought to get one, to do his job more easily. He said he wasn't interested. Cross. That he wanted us to join in his celebration. I said that we'd thought it was lugubrious, and that as I



understood it, one couldn't be forced to celebrate, if it was to mean anything. In one of these exchanges he got angry and threw his glass of sake in my face. "That's sake," he told me. He turned to Dana and said, "You and I can understand each other better. You're an Asiatic." And more, on that tack. I think Dana should recount what their conversation consisted of. She was very clear, and she turned him off that one. In an exchange with us both the subjects of fascism came up. I said I thought his use of a gang, and of intimidation, was fascistic. He said the Chinese had ripped off his country, and that he wanted to rip off theirs. The whole question of violence, then. How violent we were. Dana asked him, "And what about the people who start violence and wars in the first place?" He said, "What's the matter with wars?" And in the pause that followed that, he changed the subject, said he wanted us to join in the dance and celebration and take our clothes off." At that point, then and there. We both refused, saying that it was one more non-invitation. He asked, "Why *not*? What was our *secret*? Why didn't we *want* to undress?" To Dana he said, "Are you afraid to show your pubic hair?" We said there was no secret; we didn't dig his party, weren't there at our own choice, and didn't feel like undressing. He said that if we wouldn't undress, we'd be stripped, and he ordered his guards to do the job. They dragged us apart, and it was then that Dana started screaming. Several of them on each of us, holding us down. Only two men, Dennis White and Bill King, both of whom were married, with small children there at the seminary, said a word to try to stop it, on Dana's behalf. Trungpa stood up and punched Bill King in the face, called him a son-of-a-bitch, and told him not to interfere. The guards grabbed Bill King and got him out of there. One of the guards who'd stayed out of it, went out and vomited, as we heard later. When I was let go I got up and lunged at Trungpa. But there were three guards in between, and all I could swing at him, through the crowd, was a left, which was wrapped in the towel, and scarcely reached his mouth. It didn't amount to much, and I was dragged off, of course.

"See?" Trungpa said, "It's not so bad, is it?" When I asked, "Why us?" I meant not just the stripping, but why had we been chosen, out of all the others who'd retired early from the "celebration." But I dropped the subject — what was the point? Everybody rushed and took their clothes off, as though *that* was all it was really about. It must have been a relief. Some of them said it was; that they'd shared the whole thing with us. I asked if he was ready to call off his dogs and let us go. He said yes, and as we started out he came after us, saying something about how he really loved us. We went up to the room, where a few people were starting to pick up the broken glass and stretch plastic over the balcony door. (Laura Kaufman, whom we know only slightly, meticulously cleaned the whole bathroom.) And from there a friend drove us to the hospital.

William S. Merwin letter to Pope, Pickering, and Trupp.
7/20/77

The stripping

Niland recalls Trungpa saying "You still have to be stripped." Niland relates: "That's when Merwin said, 'all along I've just been trying to protect my woman. No one's going to see her naked body . . .'" So first they said, "O.K. Merwin, take your clothes off." He said, "I refuse, you'll have to take them off . . ." So he (Trungpa) said, "Guards, take his clothes off . . ." And he passively let people undress him."

After Merwin, Niland recalls Rinpoche saying, "Now Dana." Then, Niland relates: "He (Merwin) said, 'No, not Dana.' (Rinpoche began) talking to him in his own terms about poetry . . . that any poet worth his salt has to be willing to take his clothes off, even sometimes literally. Rinpoche was saying, 'I mean you no harm, I really like you.' . . . He was in a position to be very gracious at that point.

"Merwin wasn't buying any of it. He was screaming: 'Hitler, bastard, Nazi, cop!' Then they went to strip Dana . . . and she

fought back! . . . Then Dana was standing there, perfectly pretty girl, no scars, everyone's wondering, does she have scars or something? A long discourse went down about art and poetry and Vajrayana and Rinpoche assuring them . . ."

Interview with Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

The stripping

The only nude people during the Trungpa and Merwin confrontation were two nude people who came to the party that way — standing next to Trungpa.

Interview with Richard Assally (Faigao & Santoli) 6/27/77

Richard Assally, who removed her clothing, recalled her as being rather passive while her clothes were taken off. He asked her to relax.

Interview with Richard Assally (Faigao & Santoli) 6/27/77

Barbara Meier watched the incident, standing on a nearby table

"We (Dana and she) were just trying to become slight friends. She was hysterical, and she was looking around the room. 'What's the matter with you? Won't anybody help me? Won't someone help me? Won't someone call the police? Please, please call the police, somebody stop, stop this.'

"And she'd say, 'Joseph! what's the matter with you? Help me!' And she'd look at somebody else, 'Help me! Who are you? What kind of a friend are you? How can you let them do this to us; you're all cowards! You're all cowards! . . .'" Well, that was very *powerful*. It was very heavy — I just — my feminine button was pushed. I just really wanted to go out there and help her and I swear to God, I mean, I was just — just on the verge of like, you know, *doing* something . . . and the next thing, man, her clothes were off, and Merwin's clothes were off and she's screaming and . . . kicking, and flailing around, and there's like sort of an instant circle of guards around them. I mean, everybody's bristled like that.

"And the things that were going through my mind . . . Oh my God, I don't believe this. I just really can't believe this is happening; what's gonna happen next. I had just had this whole thing with Rinpoche too — which was incomprehensible to me. I just didn't understand what was going on. It was like his *vajra* anger somehow. His *wrath*, like all of a sudden he was a Mahakala, he was a wrathful deity . . . And somehow the whole 'take' on it was that this was an expression of our own lack of . . . this was how our frivolity and indulgence was met. And was thrown back at us. And I had no idea how far it had to go, for us . . . to realize it, and I *really* regretted getting so stoned . . . because I *did* realize something very powerful and potent was going on."

Interview with Barbara Meier (Faigao) 6/29/77

Cursing the vajra master

"She's screaming, Rinpoche and Merwin are fighting, arguing, and Rinpoche is sitting up in his chair like this; I'd never seen him like that before; but I'd never seen him come back so fast from these name callings. I'd never heard anyone call him names before. Insults. I'd never heard that — I was shocked . . ."

Barbara Meier (Bataan Faigao) 6/29/77

Did somebody come to Dana Naone's assistance?

"I think, well, Ricky (Richard Assally), I think, started to, and then Rinpoche hit him in the face . . . Richard Assally, Rinpoche hit him in the face, and said, 'strip her.' — Oh, maybe he said 'strip her' and then Richard hesitated for a minute. I

think he was, I'm pretty sure he was hit, and then he just like, 'snap', and did it. He said it was very 'powerful,' like a heavy thing to do, you know, he felt *close* to her, I mean he was relating with her, and so it was very hard to 'obey' the guru. There was like this twist happening. So at a certain point he just did it, he (Assally) just cut through his own attachment and did it. . . ."

Interview with *Barbara Meier* (Faigao) 6/29/77

Dana Naone's account of the stripping

"Trungpa said we were invited to take our clothes off, or have them taken off for us. Neither of us felt it was an invitation, and the guards were ordered to do the job. I tried to hang on to William but we were pulled apart, and I lunged at Trungpa and twisted my fingers in his belt. Guards dragged me off and pinned me to the floor. I could see William struggling a few feet away from me. I fought, and called to friends, men and women, whose faces I saw in the crowd — to call the police. No one did. Only one man, Bill King, broke through to where I was lying at Trungpa's feet, shouting, "Leave her alone" and "Stop it." Trungpa rose above me, from his chair, and knocked Bill King down with a punch, swearing at him, and ordering that no one interfere. He was dragged away. (Dennis White was the only other person in the crowd who tried to protest; he appealed to Trungpa — during the argument William and I were having with him — to leave me out of it, but Trungpa told him to shut up.) Richard Assally was stripping me, while others held me down. Trungpa began punching Assally in the head, and urging him to do it faster. The rest of my clothes were torn off."

Dana Naone, letter dated July 25, 1977 to Trupp, Pickering, and Pope

Dana called out to Landy Mallery for help, while in front of Trungpa. Mallery informed Al Santoli in an interview that he wouldn't help her because he knew Rinpoche "well enough." A few people, recalled Mallery, did try to help.

Interview with *Landy Mallery* (Santoli) 6/30/77

Bill King tried to help her, but three guys pulled him away.
Interview with *Paul Shippee* (Sanders) 6/30/77

Bill King was hit. Phil Richmond was also hit.
Interview with *Barbara Meier* (Faigao) 6/29/77

According to Allen Ginsberg, Merwin's version of the seminary incident included this verbal exchange between Merwin and Trungpa:

Merwin: "I didn't make any promises to you."

Trungpa: "You put your head in the lion's mouth."

Interview with *Allen Ginsberg*, 6/24/77 (Dorskind, Fryberger, Nager)

Ginsberg said Merwin's view of the "upshot" was: "'I respect Trungpa a great deal,' 'I love Trungpa a great deal,' or something like: 'I've learned a great deal from him, and I never want to see him again.'"

Interview with *Allen Ginsberg*, 6/24/77 (Dorskind, Fryberger, Nager)

"The next thing after that I remember is that Merwin and Dana are standing together, facing Rinpoche, just completely huddled around each other. (They are nude.) Very beautiful. Adam and Eve. They are (laughs) gorgeous bodies . . . The whole thing, just visually, was very elegant somehow. It was like a melodrama . . . He's protecting her, and she's sobbing, and she's yelling, 'How could you do this to us?' And he's saying something about, 'Well, I'm not ashamed,' and then the next thing I can remember, is him saying something about 'Well, if we have the guts to do it, what's the matter with the rest of you cowards?' At which point, it was just amazing, without any

hesitation whatsoever, everyone else, a hundred other people in that room, took off their clothes . . . The music went back on, they left the room, and people started dancing again."

Interview with *Barbara Meier* (Faigao) 6/29/77

Pan-Party Ecdysis

" . . . Then Merwin said, 'Why us? . . . Why are we the only two people in this room standing here naked in front of you?' . . . Someone in the audience cried out, 'OK Merwin, we're all going to be naked.' And every fucking person in the place took their clothes off. The music went back on, Rinpoche said, 'let's dance' . . ."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

Text of Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche letter to seminarians, placed in mail boxes morning after Halloween party:

"Evening of October 31, 1975

Dear friends,

In order to present comprehensive communication between the students and myself, I have come to the conclusion that we need to break the ice of our personal concealment. It is time for us all to be honest. If you want to maintain your patterns of hiding your deception, you are invited to leave the seminary before the Vajrayana teachings begin. Since your neurosis is already an open secret, you could be braver in unmasking it. Without commitment to yourself, there is no ground to present the Vajrayana teachings to you. I invite you to be yourself, without trips. I would like to encourage you to make a proper relationship to the coming Vajrayana talks. This requires of you the understanding that we are not fooling each other. Since you are all pretty involved in the teachings, your attempt at deception is a useless hesitation. In order to recognize your personal deceit, you must understand the umbilical cord between you and me. You must offer your neurosis as a feast to celebrate your entrance into the vajra teachings. Those of you who wish to leave will not be given a refund, but your karmic debt will continue as the vividness of your memory cannot be forgotten.

(signed)

Chogyam Trungpa, the Venerable Vajra,
Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche."

(Text not paragraphed; text delivered via taped interview by Jack Niland, 6/23/77 to A. Santoli.)

William Merwin and Dana Naone decide to stay on at the seminary

"He went and had a talk with Trungpa the next day, in which Rinpoche said he no longer had to attend classes because Merwin said he felt very self-conscious . . . He stuck it out; he showed up every time for Rinpoche's talks only. Otherwise he just stuck it out in his room, seemed to go for long drives in the country, and show up only in the evening."

Santoli asked Jack Niland if Merwin actually went through Vajrayana. Niland replied, "Absolutely — Sat there every day."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

It is reported that William Merwin, during a meeting apparently subsequent to the stripping, gave Trungpa a present of a sheath knife.

Interview with *Paul Shippee* (Sanders) 6/30/77

Jack Niland, in the company of Persis McMillen, ran into Merwin in Aspen the next day. Niland recalls: "He (Merwin) said something about Rinpoche being drunk and really blowing it. He was on the trip that he was perfectly correct in his

behavior and Rinpoche blew it, that he was just human. He said 'Rinpoche really made a fool of himself last night, didn't he?' This guy didn't get it at all."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

Alan Marlowe saw William Merwin at lunch the next day, after the party, and Merwin expressed sorrow over the cutting up of Loring Palmer and sending him to the hospital.

Alan Marlowe (Sanders) 6/26/77

Persis McMillen also, like Merwin and Dana Naone, stayed on at the seminary after the stripping. In an interview McMillen recalled that Trungpa extended Merwin and Dana a personal invitation to stay. They stayed on nearly to the end of the seminary. Trungpa seemed open and tolerant to Merwin and Dana.

Persis McMillen (Santoli) 7/1/77

"The second from the last night of the seminary... it was announced that they were going to have a... party and show slides of the dance (Halloween party)... Merwin split about an hour before the slide show and party."

Jack Niland (Santoli) 6/23/77

"Joseph and I went up to their room, or they came into our rooms. They were talking about the invasion of their privacy. And the brutality, and the violence. And they were just appalled. They couldn't reconcile that experience with their conception of Buddhism, and meditation. It was just incomprehensible to them... It was very difficult for me because I remembered the sort of bleary space that I'd been in that night, the impulse to want to help Dana, and I didn't want to apologize to them for not having helped, and they were really at fault at that, that no one had helped them, that no one had stood up for them, that we were all sheep, on and on... just completely relentless in their version of the situation. But here we were, actually sitting down, talking; we had been friends, there was some notion that we might conceivably continue to be friends, and yet, this schism had occurred, and I really didn't want to cop out on any level. I was trying to say, 'well, vajrayana teachings were ruthless; compassion takes many forms.' And they had some rapid fire answer to every statement, which in

one way or another defended their sense of 'self' — their sense of propriety. It was impenetrable.

"I actually burst into tears. I felt so frustrated... The situation was so impossible."

Interview with Barbara Meier (Faigao) 6/29/77

The reasons for staying on at the seminary

Questions 9 & 10. About why we stayed on; whether he apologized.

The day after the happenings, as his letter was tacked up, a verbal message came to us through the officers of the seminary, inviting us (yes) to stay on, "either as students or as guests". We sent back another, saying that we needed to know what he meant by those terms, and asking to see him. Several days later we were granted an interview. Quiet and polite. More on the subject of the invitation which we'd refused, and his disappointment. He asked us to stay on. I said the decision must be Dana's, since I thought she had had much the worst of it. He urged her to please stay. Said there would be no more incidents; "one landmark was enough". We had talked it over, of course, and we did so again, in front of him. We'd come to study the whole course; we'd taken it (as he knew) seriously; we wanted to finish what we'd begun, and not be scared off. The last lap, about to begin, was the famous Tantric teachings. We said that if we stayed, it would be with no guarantees of obedience, trust, or personal devotion to him. He said alright; so did we, and we shook hands. No apology on either side. He said he was disappointed in our trying to hold ourselves together after the incident: going to class, talking to people as normally as possible. In his view we should have broken down, in some public way. I said I was appalled at what had happened, but that if the circumstances were to repeat themselves, I imagined that I would act in the same way. We stayed on until the end of the Tantric teachings, the last examination, three weeks later, attending his lectures, but going to other things irregularly. The day after the examinations, the prospect of another seminary party (including slides of Hallowe'en) and of a coming blizzard forecast on the radio, that might keep us snowbound there for several more days, did not seem like things we wanted to hang around for, and we left.

W.S. Merwin, letter to Pope, Trupp, and Pickering, 7/20/77

Ed Sanders on Poetry, Crime and Culture

A native of Kansas, youthful figure skating champion, collegiate classics scholar at New York University, Ed Sanders first assaulted the world of contemporary culture and politics in the early 60's when he swam out to the Polaris nuclear submarine in a Connecticut harbor and boarded it illegally as a gesture of pacifist protest. This episode he celebrated in a work of verse, *Poem From Jail*. Soon thereafter he became editor of a seminal New York City mimeograph publication, *Fuck You, A Magazine of the Arts*; manager of the Peace Eye Bookshop; and founder-composer-vocalist of The Fugs, a rock 'n roll group of legendary stature. He published *Peace Eye Poems* and gathered prosaic Lower East Side street data for his later *Tales of Beatnik Glory*. Moving west,

he spent a year covering the Charles Manson affair, first for the L.A. *Free Press* and later in an epic narrative, *The Family*; and made two albums of free-form country rock for Warners, *Ed Sander's Truck Stop and Beer Cans on the Moon*. Since then he has published *20,000 A.D.*, a book of poems manifesting his concerns with ancient history, and has done extensive investigative research in such fields as political assassinations, cattle mutilations and domestic intelligence. His current projects include the development of an "electronic pulse lyre" and the preparation of a performance piece called "The Karen Silkwood Cantata." He currently resides with his wife and daughter in Woodstock, N.Y., where he edits the Poetry, Crime and Culture Press.



PHOTO BY RACHEL HOMER