

THE HEART CENTER – A MANDALA (23 Photos)

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The Heart Center was founded in late 1972/early 1973 just before the birth of our first child. It was a very special time for many reasons. The whole idea for the center came in a vision, so let me tell you about that first.

I had stayed up late talking with an occult scholar in Detroit. It was very, very dry and academic, so that by the time I got back to my home in Ann Arbor, I had a headache or something like one. My head was crammed/jammed with words that made little sense. I was literally nauseous.

That next morning when I got up, I was really hung over and I had not been drinking. I did not feel well. Then a strange thing happened. I found myself dropping to the floor and going through a very exact yoga exercise, sometimes called "The Cat," as in: a cat throwing up a fur ball. Anyway... my whole body went through this spontaneous kriya and it was as if, like a snake, I shed my skin of all of that stuff from the night before, and a lot more from my past. It was a transformative experience.

In the midst of all this came a symbol, one I had never seen before (and I study symbols and create logos), and I took this symbol as the sign of this new era. I enclose the symbol and a drawing I made at the time that explained (at least to me) what I had gone through.

With this symbol came an idea for a communion center, and the concept would take a whole post if not a small book to explain. Some of it is in my free book "Astrology of the Heart," if anyone is interested. The bottom line is that this was the beginning of the Heart Center, a place where people could come together and share experience. This was in 1972 and the center is still going strong now in 2010, some 38 years later.

The Heart Center has had literally thousands of visitors over the years, not to mention many astrologers, musicians, mathematicians, psychologists, and others who have stayed at the center, some for as long as 4 ½ years! Most of the great astrologers of the later 20th center were guests at the center including Dane Rudhyar, Charles Jayne, Michel Gauquelin, Noel Tyl, Rob Hand, John Townley, John Addey, Charles Harvey, Theodor Landscheidt, Roger Elliot, Jim Lewis, Angel Thompson, Gloria Starr, Steven Forrest, Jew Jawer, Neil Michelson, Robert Schmidt, Axel Harvey, and many scores more.

At one time we had staying in the center a Sanskrit scholar, a swami, an astrologer/astrologer/mathematician who had worked on the equations for lunar theory, the head astrologer for the Hari Krishna movement, all at once. Now that was fun mix.

Originally the house had eight bedrooms, but some of those rooms have been reclaimed for other uses over the years. I know I took over two of them myself, for various reasons. In recent years the center has also been a refuge for a great many young musicians, who have come to record in our studio or just crash for the night. There have been mornings when I have come into the center to find every bed filled, every couch occupied, and sleeping bags all over the floor - that kind of thing.

Over the years, the center has held more and more conferences, teachings, and visits by dharma practitioners and very high lamas. The list of distinguished Kagyu lamas who have taught and/or given empowerments at our center include His Eminence Tai Situ Rinpoche, His Eminence Shamar Rinpoche, Ven. Traleg Rinpoche, Ven. Thrangu Rinpoche, Ven. Khenpo Tsultum Gyamtso, Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, Lama Namse, Lama Karma Drodul, Lama Yeshe Gyamtso, Lama Lohdro Lhamo, Lama Kathy Wesley, and many other dharma teachers.

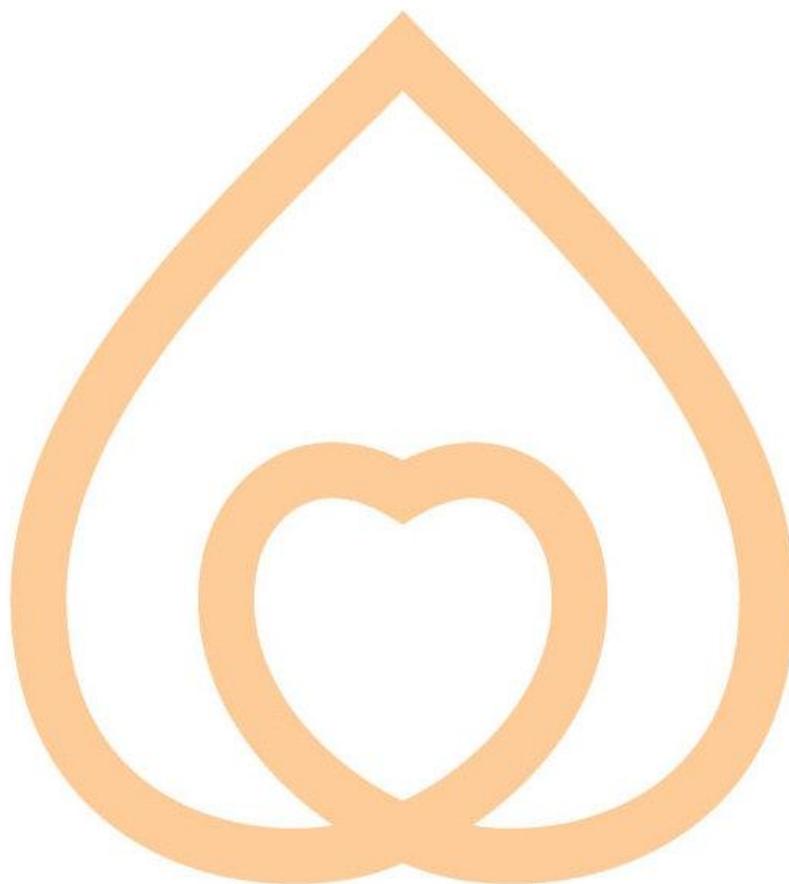
Today the center still offers Wednesday night dharma discussions along with meditation instructions and the occasional lama visit. There you have an introduction, so let's look at the photos and I will add some additional comments there.



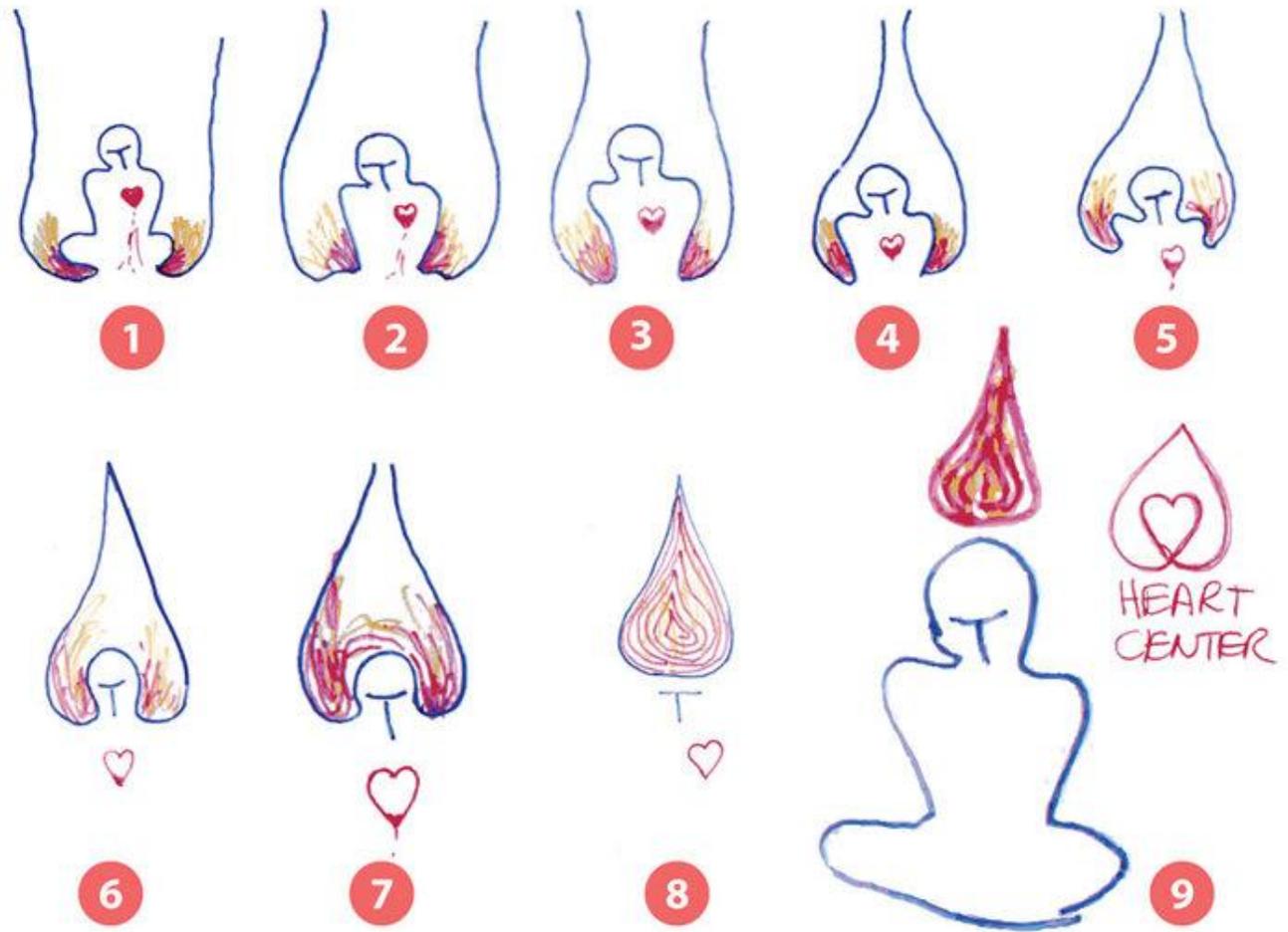
Here is the main building tucked away in the center of a quiet block in Big Rapids, Michigan. Our home is right next door to it. You can see a faded Dream Flag flying on a flagpole in the upper right, the flag designed by the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa from a dream, which said to him that as long as the dream flag waves, dharma will grow and spread.



Here you can see the walkway up to the shrine room on the left and the stupa on the right. You can't see the strings of prayer flags, but you can see one of our bird feeders on the extreme right, although now it is summer.



This is the Heart Center symbol, envisioned by me and drawn out for me by my architect friend Stanley Doctor, many years ago. It represents a heart and a flame, the younger and the older, each the inverse of the other. I like it.



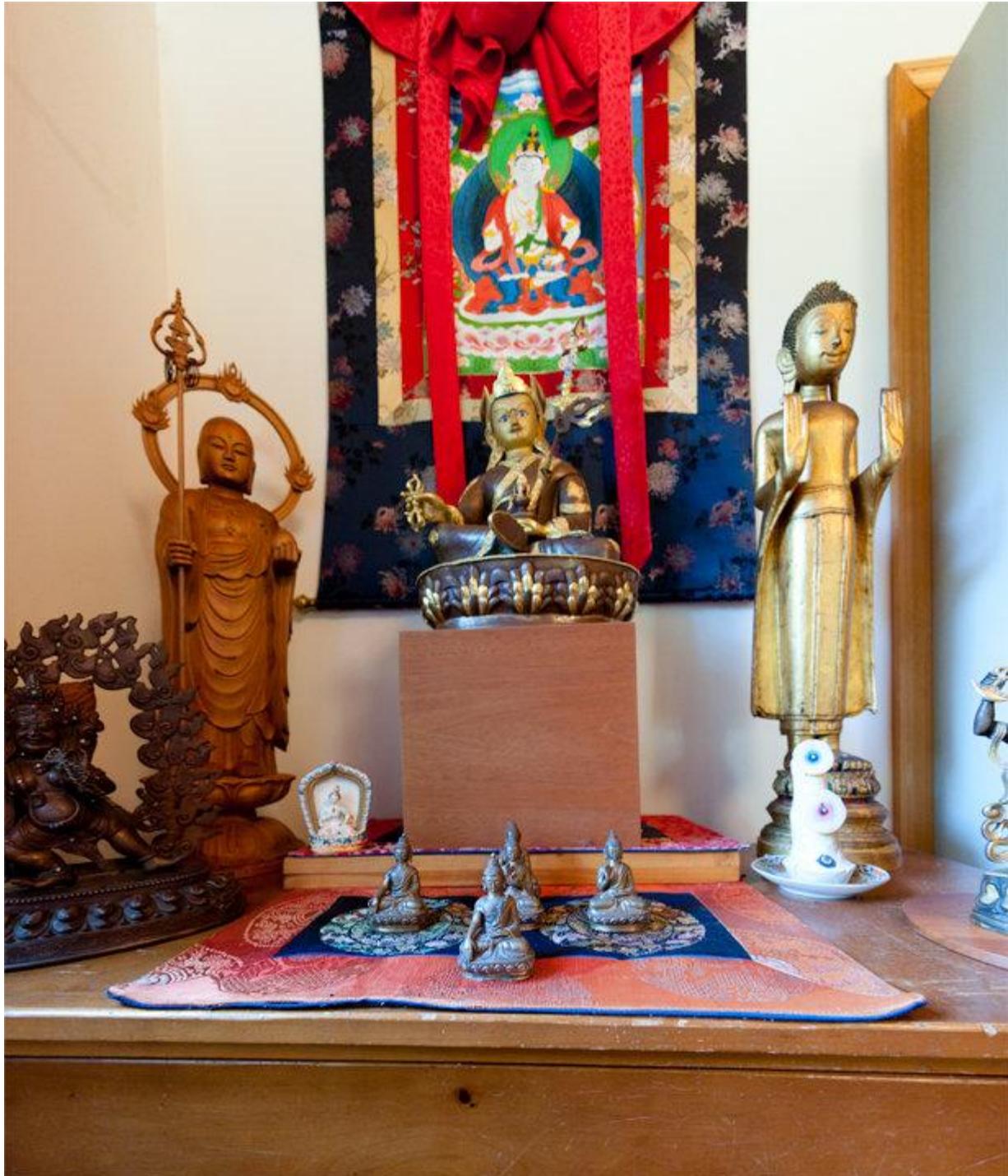
Here is a drawing I made of how the experience or vision took place back at the time. I put the numbers in so that you can get it in the proper order. I hope it speaks for itself.



Here is our main shrine room. There are several practice tables and cushions, not to mention a whole pile of cushions that you can't see at the back right. The main shrine is in the center, a second shrine is on the left, and a small teaching seat is on the right. There is also a drum for pujas on the left, and quite a few painted thangkas on the walls. The ceiling is pyramid shaped.



Here is a close-up of the main shrine. It would be too complex to call out all of the various statues, but suffice it to say that our center is dedicated to Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of the western direction, and also of death, dying, and the bardo. The large statue in the middle is of Amitabha as well as the thangka painting just above it. Various offerings are in the front row, but the water bowls had not been filled for the day when I took this photo.



This is a small shrine with various statues on it, including a wooden statue of the Japanese Bodhisattva Jizo (protector of children), given to us by our friend Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede of the Rochester Zen Center, and a wooden standing Thai Buddha, given to us by our friend Michael Katz. In the center is a statue of Guru Rinpoche, and above a painted thangka of Vajrasattva. The buddhas of the five directions are in front.



Here is the seat that visiting rinpoches teach from and there is a picture of the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, our personal lama on the small table. Behind in the corner is a statue of Manjushri, the bodhisattva connected to astrology, and above is a thangka of Guru Rinpoche. Don't forget the lotus lights on the left, which I first thought were cheesy, but now love.



This is our stupa, around which we circumambulate. It contains precious relics and other items and had to be built and oriented just so. You can see the circular walkway surrounding it, around which we walk in a clockwise direction, saying mantras and prayers. Stupas are said to represent the mind of Buddha for all beings, including animals, to see. There are eight kinds of stupas and this one is an "Enlightenment Stupa."



On your left is the side entrance to the Heart Center, and on the right you can see a little bit of our house. A patio-like area is in between the two houses. Mostly you can see some of my Milkweed plants. We let the middle and backyards grassy areas grow wild to attract more butterflies, bugs, toads, and anything. The city won't let us do it in the front, but we mow around any flowers, etc.



Here is the main living room. There are wonderful thangka pictures of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas on the wall. The couches are comfortable, and the fireplace works. A video projector on the ceiling projects films, etc. on a large screen on the wall behind.



Here is another view of the main living room, which also has a six-foot or so video screen for watching movies, dharma films, and the occasional TV somethings. This is also where our dharma discussion group meets on Wednesdays, if it is not in the shrine room.



A little music room, with a piano, some drums, too many guitars, and a bunch of other instruments in the closet. I can see on the piano Bartok's "Music for Children," and his "Mikrocosmos," and an old "Sing Out Magazine" from 1960. On the transom going into the kitchen at the back is a whole collection of Chinese Laughing Buddhas.



This is the Heart Center kitchen, and many years of many meals were prepared and shared here. The little stainless-steel bowl on the floor tells me that we have a canine visitor, a little female husky who lives here with my daughter Michael Anne.



Here is the landing upstairs (to the right), and the door to one of the bedrooms I took over for an office, which is mostly used for various photography projects. On the wall at the left is a poster for my last gig as a musician in 1972, when I was playing piano and singing under the name "Ann Arbor [heart] Song].



One of the guest bedrooms, each of which has a bunch of books, so there is always something to do.



A view into bedroom #5, which is simple but nice, decorated by batiks and appliqué work by my mother.



Here is a hallway between groups of bedrooms on the second floor. Along the walls of the hallway are images of various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas on the left, and the history of the Kagyu lineage master (thangka photos) on the right.



This is the most coveted of all the bedrooms, because many, many lamas and rinpoches have slept here. I am told by those who stay in this room that they have the most wonderful dreams. Also, there are a lot of great dharma books to read and look at here.



The top of the stairs, with a view into one bedroom at the right and a photo of a sand mandala above the stairs.



Ok this room is out of control, and I have to claim it as my junk. Mostly it is what remains of my music CD collection, with junk on the floor. Behind us are two more walls of CDs. However, most of my CD collection is gone as part of the All-Music Guide, and is now in a warehouse in Ann Arbor, over 600,000 of them. That is a lot of music.



This once was the dining area, but today is an office and where my daughter Michael Anne creates some wonderful paintings and other art pieces. Some old posters I made for my band are on the right, and back-right walls.



A nice breezy front porch with a swing, and some wood for the winter.