

Once Upon a Time in Bloomington There Was an Ashram and a Place Called the



By Peter Dorfman & Olivia Dorfman

Note: Michael Shoemaker changed his name to Swami Chetanananda in 1978. In this story, he is called “Michael Shoemaker” in references prior to that name change. He is called Swami Chetanananda or simply “the Swami” in references after that and in quotes from his recent interview with Bloom.



The brick-fronted building at 519 E. 10th St. sits deserted. Acquired last year by Indiana University from the owners of Yogi's Grill & Bar, it awaits its fate as the site of a pending university expansion. But Bloomington old-timers insist that if you look carefully, inside you can still see the bones of an earlier incarnation: the Tao Restaurant.

For those who lived in Bloomington in the 1970s, the Tao was an icon. "Bloomington had a few Chinese places, but the Tao was the first gourmet, artisanal restaurant," says Guy Loftman, a retired lawyer who frequented the Tao with his family. Many remember it as the first gourmet vegetarian restaurant they had

encountered—not just in Bloomington but anywhere in southern Indiana.

Often, there were lines leading out the door and up the street. "The first time I ever saw real maple syrup was at the Tao," recalls Carol Gulyas, who worked as a waitress there in 1975 and '76. "It was the first time I had granola. It was the first place I ever had soy sauce and toasted sesame seeds on broccoli."

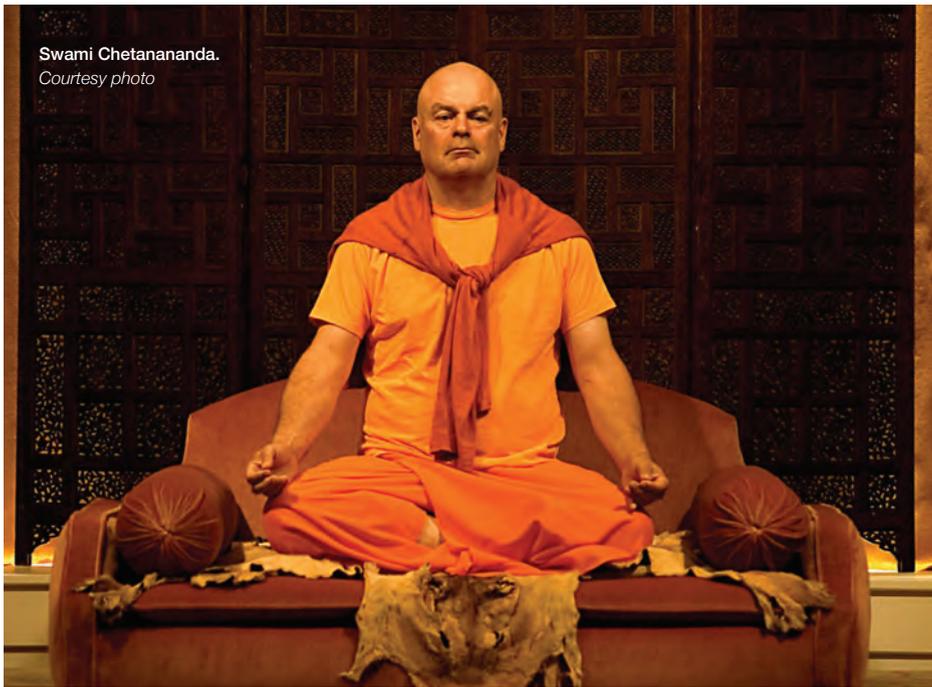
Bloomington's awakening

The Tao was a 1970s' phenomenon, but it was the product of America's 1960s' political and cultural awakening. In the middle of that decade, despite the influence of Indiana University, Bloomington culture was homo-

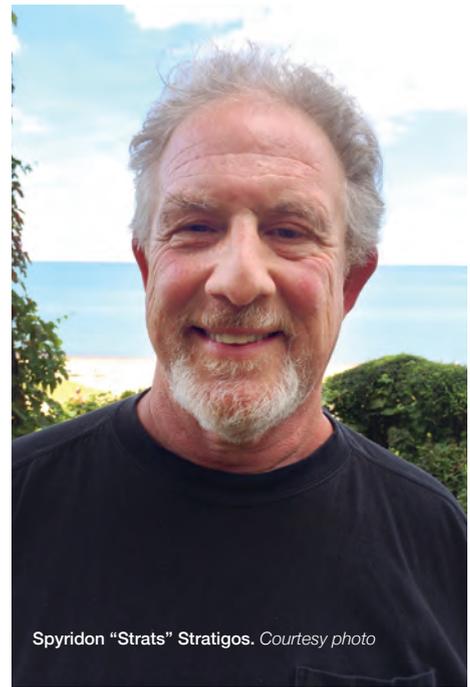


(top, l-r) Swami Chetanananda (Michael Shoemaker) and Swami Rudrananda (Albert Rudolph), better known as Rudi.

(above) The exterior of Rudi's Bakery and the Tao Restaurant. *Courtesy photos*



Swami Chetanananda.
Courtesy photo



Spyridon "Strats" Stratigos. Courtesy photo

geneous, inward-looking, and steeped in conservative, white, Christian tradition. Social life on the IU campus was focused on parties at fraternities and sororities.

In 1967, Spyridon "Strats" Stratigos arrived in Bloomington from South Bend, Indiana. Strats was to become one of Bloomington's leading entrepreneurs and restaurateurs, but at that time he was an IU student. He joined a fraternity, but quickly became disillusioned with what he saw as racism and elitism in frat life, and with the conservative, pro-Vietnam War attitudes of the fraternity brothers.

By then, unrest over the war and the state of race relations in the U.S. had reached IU. Guy Loftman was part of a group of radically minded undergraduates who formed a chapter of Students for a Democratic Society and organized demonstrations. "Some of us formed the Progressive Reform Party," Loftman remembers. "We were going to 'Berkeleyize' Bloomington, according to the explicit allegations of the Dean of Students."

In the spring of 1967, Loftman ran successfully for student body president against the candidate of a party representing the fraternities and a third party called "Try Us." The campaign chairman for the fraternity party was a charismatic young man named Michael Shoemaker. "The campaign was cordial and friendly, and we talked about issues," Loftman says. "Michael was more interesting than the candidate he was supporting."

Shoemaker would go on to have a significant impact on Bloomington culture and its business community after undergoing a profound personal, political, and spiritual transformation in the late '60s. He devoted himself to a lifetime of practicing and teaching Kundalini yoga, founded a yogic ashram, and built a succession of businesses to support it—including the Tao Restaurant, which he co-founded with Strats. By 1978, Shoemaker had shed his middle-class Hoosier persona and become Swami Chetanananda, a teacher and initiate into a religious order, through rigorous study in the U.S. and India.

Unrest and disillusionment

Shoemaker had grown up in a devout Catholic family in Connersville, Indiana. Disillusioned with small-town life and with Catholicism, he made up his mind to go to college in Bloomington. "My parents opposed my going to IU, which they considered a den of iniquity," Swami Chetanananda told *Bloom* in a recent interview. "So I paid my own way through school, and I ended up living in the Beta House fraternity."

For a time, Shoemaker became involved in conservative politics on campus. But contemporaries remember him undergoing a radical shift. He was one of the organizers of the 1969 campus strike that shut down the university for six weeks over various issues, including an impending tuition increase. The strike ended when the acting chancellor, John Snyder, announced the university was acceding to the students' demands—a prom-

ise on which Swami Chetanananda says the university reneged after the semester ended.

"I feel the one thing that the student strike and the anti-Vietnam War movement accomplished was that we taught the institutions in the United States how to deal with dissent effectively," he ruefully recalls.

By 1970, demoralized by the failure of the protests and strikes to achieve real change, Shoemaker went through a period of depression. He grew increasingly alienated from American traditional culture and looked for alternative sources of meaning. One of those alternatives was Eastern spirituality.

"My math TA [teaching assistant] had a yoga class," he says. "I started taking the class with him. For the first time in my life, I really felt connected to myself, to my body, to my heart. I just dug into yoga."

Urban counterculture had latched onto Asian Buddhist and yogic traditions decades earlier. While these traditions were generally considered eccentric and were lampooned in Hollywood films, many stopped laughing when, by 1967, the Beatles, Rolling Stones, and other young arbiters of culture had adopted Transcendental Meditation and fallen under the spell of its most famous proponent, an Indian guru named Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

Strats had undergone a similar disillusionment. A period of experimentation with psychedelic drugs gave way to an interest in Eastern mysticism. He became involved with a group of American Sufis (adherents to a mystical strain of Islam). Shortly thereafter—

Swami Chetanananda remembers it as New Year's Eve, 1970—he and Strats and their Sufi friends decided to throw in together.

They rented the former Phi Kappa Theta fraternity house at the corner of East 8th Street and North Fess Avenue and turned it into the Sufi House. Shoemaker taught yoga and meditation there twice a week. “We had 25 of our closest friends living there, and we had a meditation center,” Swami Chetanananda recalls.

It was at the Sufi House that Strats and Shoemaker met David Komito, an IU graduate student who had come under the influence of a New York-based teacher of Kundalini yoga known as Swami Rudrananda—Rudi for short.

Kundalini is a Tantric yoga practice that provides a feeling of enlightenment through deep meditation, focused breathing, disciplined posture, and chanting. Shoemaker was intrigued. “I was starting to have experiences in my yoga practice that made me think I was in over my head,” he says. “I was having mystical experiences that I didn't understand.”

Shoemaker soon found himself in New York, face to face with Rudi, a rotund, native Brooklynite who defied every stereotype of an Eastern swami. Born to Jewish parents in 1928, Rudi (born Albert Rudolph) had been having mystical experiences since the age of 6. He became a swami in 1966 after traveling to India to study with Swami Muktananda, a teacher with an international network of influence.

“I looked at Rudi and realized in less than a minute that this was what I was supposed to be doing,” Swami Chetanananda remembers. “I instantly loved him and realized he was my teacher.”

Another way Rudi defied the stereotype of an Eastern guru was in his pragmatism. He was no ascetic—meditating alone, living on alms, and drinking rainwater. Rudi was both in and of the world. He was one of the world's leading dealers in Asian art, maintaining a shop in lower Manhattan and supplying other dealers. He was friendly with many of Manhattan's leading gallery owners and abstract expressionist artists. “Rudi owned the building where Willem de Kooning's studio was,” the Swami says. “When de Kooning moved out to Long Island, Rudi moved into that studio and that's where I lived when I stayed with him in New York.”

Rudi's assets also included 525 acres in the Catskill Mountains north of New York City, a former resort in the town of Big Indian, which he renamed the Shree Gurudev Rudrananda Yoga Ashram. Rudi's students restored and maintained the property and opened a restaurant to help support the ashram. It was a model that Rudi and his followers ultimately would replicate across the United States and Europe.

People from the Sufi House in Bloomington soon followed Shoemaker to New York to meet Rudi. Strats arrived with two friends. Rudi took them out to Big Indian and put them to work. Strats was assigned to tend goats.

“In between the meals and meditations, Rudi was walking around and hugging his devotees,” Strats recalls. “He came up to me on this gravel road and hugged me, and he put his forehead to my forehead, and then he touched me very gently on the base of my spine and I swooned. I just fell over. He caught me and he laid me down on the gravel. It was an extraordinary out-of-body experience. I was lying there in an ecstatic state and thinking, ‘I can't get up.’ I remember him saying to me, ‘Just lie there and absorb it.’ Gurus have these little powers; apparently his power was he could manifest what they call *shakti*, which is energy. I don't know the clinical explanation.”

Strats joined Komito and Shoemaker in upstate New York for the rest of the summer. Then Rudi advised them that it was time to return to Bloomington and start an ashram of their own. “I remember us saying, ‘What do you mean, we don't have any money,’” Strats says. “And Rudi replied, ‘Any shmuck can do it with money.’”

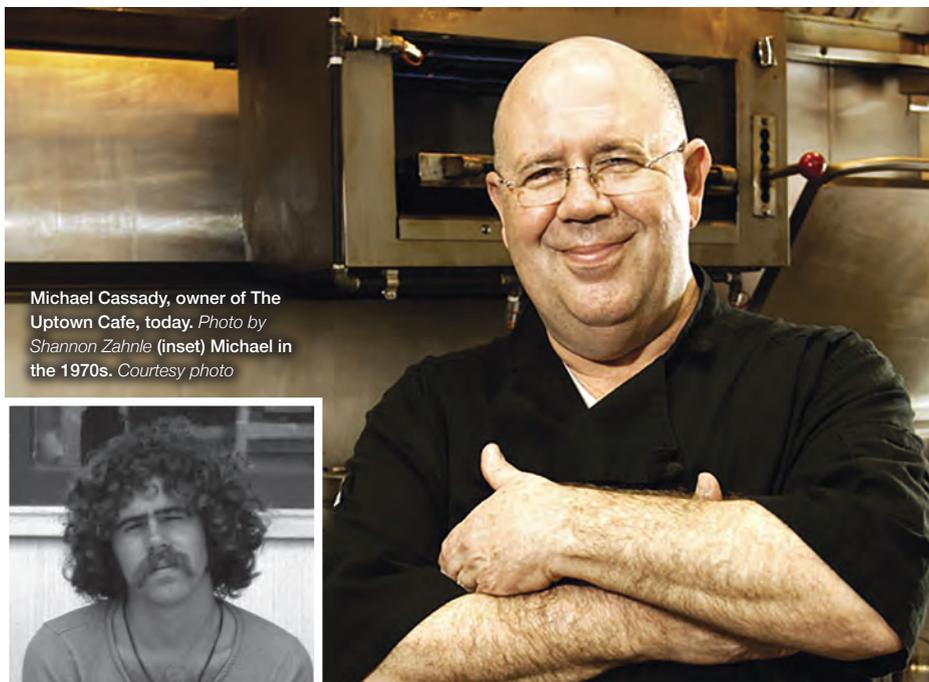
The ashram at 14th & Madison

The trio returned to Indiana. “I hitchhiked back to Bloomington at the end of August 1971,” Swami Chetanananda says. “I had a Boy Scout backpack, an army surplus air mattress, my fraternity blanket, a pair of work boots, an extra pair of blue jeans, a hooded sweatshirt—and five dollars.”

He announced to friends that he was starting an ashram, and they responded. One of them was Michael Cassady, who later became one of Bloomington's most successful restaurateurs with the opening of The Uptown Cafe. “I was a 20-year-old, open, vulnerable, searching guy, and Rudi came here to give some talks and it just really hit me,” Cassady says. “So we all moved into what became the original ashram.”

Shoemaker, Komito, and Strats cobbled together a few thousand dollars, and Shoemaker found a house at West 14th and North Madison streets that he managed to purchase on a land contract, which allowed him to buy the house for essentially no money down.

The large foursquare house was home to as many as 40. It featured an airy meditation space and a living room where ashram members sat cross-legged on the floor and ate meals while Shoemaker spoke from an elevated platform. The house was furnished with Asian carpets and art from Rudi's sources—sources Shoemaker tapped to start an Asian art and antique store in Bloomington.





Carol Steward with her future husband, David Gulyas, back in the day when she waited tables at the Tao. (inset) Carol Steward Gulyas today. Courtesy photos

ton, one of a diverse succession of ashram businesses that provided the income to pay meditation instructors and mortgages.

The New Age Deli

But the centerpiece of the ashram business portfolio was an unlikely enterprise called the New Age Deli.

Housed in a rented former office supply store on the corner of East 10th and North Washington streets, the New Age Deli was a classic hippie establishment fueled chiefly by altruism and tantric bliss. The original visionary and proprietor was Steve White, who lived at a Brown County commune in Needmore. Shoemaker had helped with the build-out; Strats and another Sufi House resident had worked there.

“Steve White was the real deal,” Strats recalls. “He was a beautiful man—he died many years ago, a sad story. Drugs were involved. But people gravitated to him. He had long blond hair, and he was selfless. He would cook a big pot of soup and give it away free to people in Dunn Meadow.”

White’s encounter with Rudi in California led to the creation of the New Age Deli in Bloomington.

“In the fall of 1971, I was sitting down in Dunn Meadow one day, and Steve White

walked up to me,” Swami Chetanananda says. “He told me he’d met Rudi in San Francisco in the summer of 1970. He asked if he could come to New York and study, and Rudi said, ‘Go back to where you came from and start a restaurant. Run it for two years, and if you can sustain that, then you can come study with me.’ So the inspiration for the New Age Deli was Rudi’s instruction to Steve White.”

White’s idea was to start a vegetarian restaurant, run more or less communally. “This was really a loose confederation of hippies, some of whom are still here in Bloomington,” Strats says. “I was a dishwasher. Everybody was inspired by doing vegetarian food cheap, and we worked for practically nothing. When it opened, there was a swami who did a blessing for the place. It was very cool.”

The Tao and the ashram

By the time Strats, Shoemaker, and Komito returned to Bloomington from New York, however, the New Age Deli was a shambles. People had left and the business was failing. “I had this idea of taking it over with a friend named Jeffrey Morris, who had lived in the Sufi House,” Strats says.

Strats, Shoemaker, and Morris paid off the deli’s debts and took charge of the business.

“With money from Jeffrey Morris, we bought a truck, cleaned up the restaurant, and fixed up some of the equipment,” Swami Chetanananda says. “The stove got refurbished with a hood and an exhaust system. And we opened the place the first of October 1971 as the Tao Restaurant. I wanted to call it ‘Rudi’s,’ but Strats insisted we call it ‘the Tao.’”

The restaurant flourished quickly, despite its novice management team. “Nobody had any expertise at all,” the Swami allows today. “There was no manual for making an ashram or opening a vegetarian restaurant.”

The Tao didn’t start as an ashram business, but gradually ashram members assumed most of the kitchen and wait staff jobs. “It wasn’t a rigid takeover,” Strats says. “It just happened kind of organically, and the place became associated then with the ashram.”

Tao stories abound. “It was a great place to learn how to work,” says former waitress Carol Gulyas. “The manager, Cheryl Berling, she was a very disciplined and intimidating person. I was a pretty good waitress, but I would rush things. I was trying to put a salad together, but Cheryl stuck it in my face and said, ‘Take the time to do it right.’ People worked at a high level of intensity, and when things got stressful they would be doing their

yoga breathing. I could see them processing their stress, especially the line cooks.”

The wait staff was trained to treat customers with unusual intimacy recalls Nan McKinley, who joined the staff in 1972 at the age of 17 and then moved into the ashram after turning 18. “We hardly ever used our last names,” she says. “The wait staff would sit down next to you and take your order. It was like a refuge, with cool people to hang out with. It was the only place in Bloomington that felt like that.”

Friends and associates remember the Tao kitchen as highly disciplined and drug-free—almost. Strats recalls turning up for work after smoking marijuana. “I hadn’t been stoned in years,” he asserts. “I went back to work and I was goofy, high, and laughing, and I started playing around with leftover beans. I created a veggie burger—that was the day the Tao Veg Burger was born.” (For the recipe, visit magbloom.com/taorecipes.)

The Veg Burger was a Tao staple long before mass-produced veggie burgers came on the market. “We had a menu on a blackboard out front,” Strats says. “Next to the Veg Burger I would write, ‘Over five sold, over 10 sold’—a take-off on the McDonald’s sign.”

Great moments at the Tao

Kenny Aronoff is one of rock’s most successful drummers. In the fall of 1977, though, Aronoff was living with six bandmates in a famously squalid house they called the Roach Motel, overlooking Dunn Meadow. [Editor’s note: It’s still there and it’s still called the Roach Motel.] “We didn’t have much money,” he recalls. “My contribution to the rent was \$62 a month.”



Drummer Kenny Aronoff.
Photo by Shannon Zahnle



Guy Loftman today. Photo by Jim Krause (inset) Guy back in the day. Courtesy photo

It was a short walk to the Tao, and Aronoff was a regular. “The Tao Dinner was \$2.99, and you got beans, rice, tofu, and vegetables, and a big chunk of whole wheat bread,” he says. “I would eat there every day.”

Important moments in Aronoff’s career came about at the Tao. “One night after a gig, this waitress came up to me—I was always flirting with her,” he says. “I was being a smartass, and I pretended I was going to stab her in the hand with a fork. But I actually penetrated her hand. I drew blood. She thought I was the biggest jerk. I ended up marrying that woman, Lisa Farnsworth. She’s the mother of my son, Nikolai Aronoff.”

By 1980, Aronoff was planning to move to New York City but got a chance to audition for Lou Rawls’ band in Los Angeles. “I went to the Tao for a meal before heading to the airport,” he says. “I ran into Lucy Allen, a singer-songwriter I knew, and she said, ‘You know, last night, John Mellencamp fired his drummer.’ I went right to a pay phone and called up Mike Wanchic [Mellencamp’s guitarist] and asked for the gig. Eventually I got it and the rest is history.” Aronoff’s 17-year ride as Mellencamp’s drummer started with a phone call from the Tao.

Raves for the food

Success ultimately led to expansion into a new space just for baking. “We were making our own organic whole wheat bread at the Tao, and people were coming in and buying it over-the-counter,” Swami Chetanananda says. “So we moved up the street to East 10th and Grant and started baking bread there, and that turned into Rudi’s Bakery. We were making and selling other things—

we had the best doughnuts I’ve ever had in my life at Rudi’s Bakery in Bloomington. We had unbelievable cheese Danish.”

Decades later, though, it’s the Tao poppy seed cake that people remember first. “I can still taste it,” Guy Loftman says. The recipe came from the grandmother of a young woman in the ashram.

“I made yogurt at the Tao three days a week,” the Swami says. “We were the first restaurant to serve yogurt in Bloomington. We were the first people in Bloomington to make a Greek salad. We also were the first people to bring in smoked salmon. We were the first to roast our own coffee and sell it here.”

Carol Gulyas recalls the food was vegetarian, but gourmet. “You could have brown rice and vegetables for lunch, but then you could have gnocchi in the evening,” she says. “I would guess it had the only espresso machine in the entire state.”

The Tao introduced new foods to many in Bloomington.

“We had *gomasio* on the table every day—pan-roasted sesame seeds with sea-salt, ground up together. People in Bloomington had never seen that,” Nan McKinley says. “Everything was made from scratch. We kept starter for sourdough pancake batter going all the time. I worked in the bakery, and we made a cottage cheese dill bread from a recipe my mother had used when I was growing up. It was a best-seller. They were always open to new ideas like that.”

Guy Loftman recalls, “Eventually they started serving chicken—delicious chicken sandwiches. They were big on avocados, which were exotic in the ‘70s.”



Growth and tragedy

The organization that spawned the Tao may have begun as a ragtag group of hippie yogis, but it didn't stay that way long. The connection with Rudi's ashram in Big Indian provided a New York-to-Bloomington pipeline for people and ideas.

And then, suddenly, Rudi was gone. He died in a small plane crash in upstate New York. Shoemaker went to New York to meet with the board of the Rudrananda Ashram Foundation, Inc., which administered the assets of Rudi's various ashrams and businesses. After a contentious meeting—Swami Chetanananda refers to it as a “demarkation of factions”—Shoemaker, the son of a Catholic pharmacist and a nurse in Connersville, Indiana, wound up in charge of his own network of ashrams and businesses.

In 1973, Michael Cassady left the ashram and ultimately started a tiny breakfast establishment on North Walnut called The Uptown Cafe. In 1984, with Strats as a business partner, Cassady moved the restaurant to its current location on East Kirkwood. The cottage cheese pancakes Cassady had made at the Tao are still on The Uptown's menu.

Strats and Shoemaker also parted ways in 1973. The partners had differences over man-



agement—particularly, Strats recalls, over ashram leadership and the separation between ashram finances and those of the restaurant and the other businesses Shoemaker and his associates had launched in Bloomington. There were several—the Tao, Rudi's Bakery, a second restaurant in Brown County, an Asian art and antique store, a construction company, a woodworking shop, and an art gallery and framing shop.

(This page and opposite page) Three views inside the Tao. Friends and associates remember the Tao kitchen as highly disciplined and drug-free.

Courtesy photos



“Bloomington, when we started, was having a magic moment,” Swami Chetananda says. “We saved up \$20,000 in our savings account in seven years. And Joel Marver, who was our bookkeeper, suggested we invest the money. I had a student in New York who was a stock analyst, and he told me that I should buy savings-and-loan stock because inflation was out of control. President Carter had put on credit controls to reduce inflation, and as a result, savings-and-loan stocks had tanked. Joel felt there would be a tremendous rebound. So I sent Joel to buy savings-and-loan stock. What he came home with were T-bond futures. I sent Joel to buy an asset, and he came home with a liability. But 30 days later, Carter removed credit controls, and in the next six weeks T-bonds went from 52 to 96. And our \$20,000 investment made about \$1.5 million.”

Along with its new financial resources, the Tao saw an infusion of sophistication in the kitchen. It happened that adjoining the Big Indian property in the Catskills was the home of Eugene Bernard, who had been the last living sous chef for Auguste Escoffier, the legendary chef at the Savoy Hotel in Paris. After Escoffier died, Bernard had an illustrious career of his own. He had been

personal chef to Spanish dictator Generalissimo Francisco Franco and the Diem brothers in South Vietnam. He’d been head chef at Quo Vadis, one of the most famous restaurants in Manhattan. Lastly, he’d been head chef at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York.

Shoemaker had just completed a remodel of the restaurant in Big Indian in 1975 when Bernard began coming in six mornings a week just for fun, teaching the kitchen staff how to cook. And several of those he trained wound up at the Tao in Bloomington.

Milton Glaser, a renowned graphic artist, designer, and co-founder of *New York Magazine*, had been a follower of Rudi’s. Glaser ultimately created poster art displayed at the Tao Restaurant and designed the cover of *The Tao of Cooking*, the restaurant’s cookbook. Through Glaser, Shoemaker met Joe Baum, the owner of several restaurants in the World Trade Center, including Windows on the World, which Glaser had designed. “Baum taught us his entire restaurant planning process, which we adapted at the Tao,” the Swami recalls.

In 1976, the ashram launched Rudi’s Wine and Cheese, a gourmet shop, in

College Mall. It imported fine wines from Bordeaux and Burgundy, European cheeses, and dried meats. “IU President Herman Wells used to come every week and buy a massive wheel of brie from us,” the Swami says. “We used to call him ‘Herman Brie.’”

The Tao of Cooking was published by Ten Speed Press in 1982. The author was Sally Pasley, a former Big Indian chef who had been trained by Bernard and moved to Bloomington in 1978. Pasley estimates the book sold 40,000 copies. IU Press re-issued the book in 1998, and can be purchased there and on Amazon. Pasley and her husband left the ashram after disagreements over copyright and royalties.

By then, however, relations between Bloomington and the ashram had been strained by a series of disputes and negative media articles. Swami Chetananda felt he and the ashram had worn out their welcome.

Attitudes evolve

The Tao and the ashram inevitably attracted suspicion among conservative Hoosiers, though city fathers could not deny that it served a purpose in Bloomington.

Former members recall that many of their ashram peers were in a kind of



(above) Swami Chetanananda returns to Bloomington once or twice a year. He's pictured in front of the now defunct Yogi's, where the Tao was located.



(left) Swami Chetanananda at the Tao in its heyday. Courtesy photos

recovery, often from bad drug experiences. Many of those who worked for the ashram's businesses would have had difficulty finding work with mainstream employers. The ashram was turning lives around, and it had support among Bloomington's government and its business community.

But attitudes evolve. Gradually, as the '70s wore on, aspects of the ashram culture

that ran counter to heartland norms began to draw criticism.

As the ashram businesses became more visible in the community, there were suggestions that its arrangement with its members was exploitative. Members worked essentially for room and board. There was little left when those expenses were deducted from their pay. Most worked full

time, sometimes 12 to 16 hours a day. They waited tables, and cleaned and made veggie burgers on Mondays when the restaurant was closed. They entered into this arrangement voluntarily, but inevitably some who left expressed bitterness about what they saw as the extraordinary privileges the ashram's leaders appeared to enjoy.

Another focal point for criticism was sex. The 1970s represented a high-water mark for the sexual revolution in the U.S., and media accounts from that period need to be read in that context. Stories in the Bloomington newspaper (then called *The Herald-Telephone*) and the *Indiana Daily Student* suggested the ashram's leaders were taking advantage of junior members of the group.

Rudi was homosexual; Swami Chetanananda and other followers who still revere Rudi freely acknowledge this. In 1978, in Southern Indiana, that feature of the ashram culture cast a shadow.

"We were a bunch of 20-year-olds living together in a small space," Swami Chetanananda says today. "For seven years, most of us worked seven days a week, 18 hours a

day. Most of the boys and the girls had some kind of sexual interaction with one another. There was a lot of that, and I had no interest in controlling it. The second thing was that Rudi was gay. ... In Bloomington, Indiana, in 1971, or at any point when I lived there, men having sex with men was really not acceptable for most people.”

A turning point for Swami Chetanananda came in 1978 with the publication of a lengthy newspaper exposé. Robert May, a member of the board of the foundation that ran several of the ashram’s businesses, had introduced the Swami to the editor of *The Herald-Telephone*. “They pitched the idea of doing an in-depth article on the ashram,” the Swami says. “They said they wanted Bloomington to understand the good work we were doing. So, I said okay. The article came out the Sunday

after the news about the Jonestown commune in Guyana broke. And they were, in some sense, insinuating that we were a cult comparable to Jonestown.”

The insinuation was in a sidebar offering a dissenting view of life in the ashram and of Swami Chetanananda’s leadership, citing a former member who asserted the yoga practice had taken him too far from his Christian roots. But the core allegation was that the young seeker had met Rudi on a visit to Big Indian, and that Rudi had attempted to sexually seduce him.

“The reporter did a hatchet job on Rudi,” the Swami asserts. “It broke my heart. I realized at that point that I was done in Bloomington. I felt conservative forces had pushed me from the town. I still feel that today.”

In 1981, Swami Chetanananda and his followers pulled up stakes and moved the

ashram to Cambridge, Massachusetts. They closed the ashram businesses and sold the Tao to restaurateurs who ran it as the Tao until 1982. In 1993, after a dozen years of relatively low-profile operations, the ashram moved again, to Portland, Oregon, where Swami Chetanananda continues his yoga practice through the Nityananda Institute at the Movement Center.

The imprint remains

The Tao has been gone from Bloomington for more than 36 years, but it left an imprint. Ashram alumni have gone on to successful, mainstream careers. Lois Lam-brecht, a former member, is now a physician in Bloomington. Several former members have earned advanced degrees, including Sally Pasley’s husband, who earned a law degree at Harvard.

At least two current Bloomington restaurants—The Uptown Cafe and Le Petit Café, a French provincial restaurant on West 6th Street adjoining the B-Line Trail— can trace their roots to the Tao. “The prints on the wall of the dining room, those were a gift from Swami,” says Marina Ballor, the Le Petit Café co-owner who worked as a waitress at the Tao in 1976. “When we were about to open the café in 1977, he said, ‘Go to the framing shop and pick as many as you like, and we’ll frame them for you.’ It was very generous.”

The Tao served a hugely popular salad dressing—simply called Tao Dressing (Visit magbloom.com/taorecipes for the recipe.). It is still available at Bloomingfoods.

Several of those who shared in the ashram experience and were important figures in the operation of the Tao have expressed mixed emotions about their experiences, but nonetheless have rekindled warm friendships with Swami Chetanananda. The former Michael Shoemaker returns once or twice a year to Bloomington; he’ll appear at The Uptown Cafe, and he and Strats go birding together.

“There were flaws in the business model for the ashram and the businesses, and those flaws might have worked to Michael Shoemaker’s personal benefit,” Guy Loftman suggests. “But that doesn’t mean a lot of other people didn’t benefit from it, and it doesn’t mean they didn’t have an absolutely great restaurant.” ✨

The Tao of Cooking

Rudi’s Poppy Seed Cake

This dense, moist cake was the cornerstone of the excellent reputation of Rudi’s Bakery in Bloomington, Indiana. It is adapted from the book *The Tao of Cooking* by Sally Pasley (Indiana University Press, 1998). For more recipes from the book, visit magbloom.com/taorecipes.



Ingredients

- 1/2 cup butter
- 1/2 cup shortening
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 5 egg yolks
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 cups cake flour
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup poppy seeds
- 5 egg whites

- Preheat oven to 350 F.
- Cream butter and shortening with sugar. Beat in egg yolks and vanilla.
- Sift flour, salt, and baking soda together and add to creamed mixture alternately with sour cream. Stir in poppy seeds.
- Beat egg whites until stiff but not dry. Fold into batter one half at a time.
- Pour batter into a greased and floured 9-inch tube pan. Bake for 45 to 50 minutes, until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

Serve plain or iced with cream cheese frosting.