

Former inmates of Ferndale Minimum Security Institution in Canada, Segen Speer-Senner and Gareth Robinson (Miki & Robbie,) have created a peaceful garden and shrine in the prison grounds, beside a small stream and just across from the American Indian spiritual grounds. Deer, bears and small mammals visit the

but Miki, who was able to email MANDALA thanks to the kindness of prison chaplain Reverend David Price, says that, "The shrine is in good hands, and being carefully maintained. Our precious Ani-la Ann [Ven. Ann McNeil, director of Kachoe Zung Juk Ling Abbey in British Columbia, who regularly visits both prisons,] reports that kind non-Buddhist inmates at Ferndale have taken over the upkeep when we left. Buddhist inmates who transferred from here have kept it in good order, planted more flowers, and repainted the gazebo.

"Not only do all inmates from Ferndale have access to the site until from 7A.M. to 12 midnight, but many staff from both Ferndale and Mission institutions visit the shrine on a regular basis. They say they find it peaceful, relaxing and spiritually uplifting – a respite from a hectic day.

"Unfortunately, we were transferred before we could go about obtaining a prayer wheel and our plans to erect a stupa did not eventuate.

"Now that we are back at Mission, we are again tutoring, at the GED level, in the Mission Institution School, taking care of the Christian chapel's plants, and continuing to transcribe for the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive (LYWA). [Miki and Robbie have transcribed hundreds of hours of tapes for the Archive and have earned praise and gratitude from its directors, Nick Ribush and Wendy Cook.]

Although the transfer out of Ferndale seemed like a step backward, and their case is being appealed, the more restricted movement and shorter working hours have enabled the men, after taking their Bodhisattva Vows, to complete Vajrasattva and Medicine Buddha retreats.

"Following that, Ani-la led us in a Dorje Khadro fire puja. We are soon to do a Mitrugpa Retreat and then we'll study the FPMT's Spiritual Program Coordinator program, so that we can better help Ani-la with courses for our fellow inmates.

"Nick and Wendy regularly send us books from the LYWA, so we have lots to read between transcribing projects. We are in the midst of a Tibetan language course at the moment and find that very exciting. When one can actually read (at least a little) what once merely appeared as some esoteric symbols, it is very exhilarating. It is a struggle, as it is presented in a manner unlike any language course we have taken before, but we are persevering. So you can see that, although coming here was somewhat of a physical letdown, spiritually we have been able to benefit greatly and so we are very happy.

"In addition to the joy of Ani-la's visits, we have been helped in our studies and work by a Buddhist couple, Sue and Rick, two of Ani-la's students/benefactors. Sue comes into the institution with Ani-la and Rick helps us via e-mail.

"Thank you for your wonderful work with MANDALA. We read each issue from cover to cover, savoring each moment, and we look at [the Liberation Prison Project's] beautiful calendar every day." ❁



A LIBERATING CORNER OF A PRISON

area – and occasionally chew the vegetation. Statues of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, Avalokiteshvara in the aspect of Kwan-Yin Bodhisattva and Maitreya Buddha have been placed in the shrine. The project has been generously supported by prison administration.

One prisoner, who is now back out in the community, built the platform and used it after working hours to do many hours of Vajrasattva recitations. Buddhist and non-Buddhist inmates helped Miki and Robbie to erect a shelter and translucent roof on the platform. Bright paint makes the belvedere clearly visible from a distance, and prayer flags abound.

Reg Dyck, a devout Mennonite at the Ferndale Horticultural Department, who supervised the men's gardening, gave advice and generously donated trees, perennials, flowers and labor. A footpath of about eighty-eight paces allows one to circumambulate the holy statues and the gardens.

Eighteen months ago, Miki and Robbie, who are serving life sentences, were transferred to nearby Mission Institution,



Photo Sue Foster