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Interviewer: Venerable Jue Fang

Interviewee: Venerable Miao You

00:00 Venerable Jue Fang

This is Venerable Jue Fang interviewing Venerable Miao You on the 10th of May 2024. This recording is taking place at Nan Tien Institute, 231 Nolan Street, Unanderra, New South Wales 2526. The interview is being recorded for the State Library of New South Wales Oral History Collection and Nan Tien Temple 30th Anniversary Oral History Project.

00:30 Venerable Jue Fang

Good afternoon, Venerable Miao You.

00:33 Venerable Miao You

Good afternoon.

00:35 Venerable Jue Fang

Thank you for accepting our interview. I understand that you have been a very important person in Nan Tien Temple¹ and instrumental to the development of Nan Tien Temple and Nan Tien Institute². So, we have some questions for you.

00:51 Venerable Jue Fang

Could you start with telling us a bit about your family background and your early journey? For example, please introduce yourself. Where were you born? Where were you from? And something about your family.

01:06 Venerable Miao You

Okay, thank you Venerable Jue Fang, for having me here, and to be a part of the history of the Nan Tien Temple and the Nan Tien Institute. I think it's, it's probably a record of my achievements, if you can put it that way, in my life.

01:28 Venerable Miao You

Hmm, and also shows that I think the temple appreciates and values my contribution. So, my name is Shi Miao You, and I've been a director and company secretary of the Nan Tien Temple since 2003. So, I was born in Singapore in 1953, and I come from a Chinese family, even though a lot of people think that I'm not Chinese.

¹ Nan Tien Temple, located in Berkeley, New South Wales, is one of the branch temples of Fo Guang Shan. It is the largest Buddhist temple in the southern hemisphere and has served as a significant cultural bridge and tourist attraction since its opening in October 1995.

² Nan Tien Institute (NTI), founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, is the first higher education institution in Australia that combines centuries of Buddhist wisdom with modern holistic studies. <https://www.nantien.edu.au/>

02:07 Venerable Miao You

And my father used to be a fitter and turner, and he worked for the British Naval Base. And my mum was a seamstress, like, so she sews a lot to help to subsidise family income. So, I'm one of five siblings. I am number two.

02:30 Venerable Miao You

I have an elder sister and then a brother and two twin sisters at the end. Hmm, the spoken language or the dialect for my family is Cantonese, though I also speak other dialects, so our main communication at home is Cantonese and English.

02:57 Venerable Miao You

My elder sister is Chinese-educated, but we we seldom communicate in Mandarin. Hmm, and that's why, like, my Chinese is actually very poor. Hmm, I guess my mum is a Daoist. She goes to temple, like the Kuan Yin Temple or the Bright Hill Temple in Singapore, but we are not really a Buddhist family as such.

03:32 Venerable Miao You

And one thing about my mother, she never forced us to do anything, and so we are very liberal. Hmm, so in, my brother was about five or six years younger than me, and then, after my brother came, we have twin sisters.

03:56 Venerable Miao You

So, within that two years, my mother had three toddler and infants back in the late 1950s or early 60s when I was starting to go to school, so it's been very challenging. And so my childhood was one of responsibilities, so I have to look after my younger brothers and sisters, washing the nappies and everything.

04:29 Venerable Miao You

So, it wasn't a very happy childhood in the right sense of the word, but I still manage, somehow to to meet the demands of my mum. Hmm, she's very strict, but she's also very fair. So, there was not a lot of freedom in our family, but when, I remember when I was third grade, I asked my mum permission to go swimming, like, to take swimming lessons, and then she agreed.

05:12 Venerable Miao You

And then, since then, every day, I went swimming. And the swimming part was my refuge. It allows me to express myself in the water through diving. I'm just like a water baby. So that that childhood that I remember was, I think, that aspect was my best part of my childhood.

05:41 Venerable Miao You

So, I am a very independent person, and yeah, because of the family context, see, nobody takes me anyway, so I have to find my own way. Whether I go to school, or I go swimming or whatever activities I do, yeah, I, I just find the resources and the way to get there.

06:13 Venerable Miao You

So, I guess it helps me to become very resourceful even in my, in my adult life. And so at a very young age, it was kind of drilled into me that, you know, family is first, family responsibility. So even in my teens years, in my secondary school, after school I always come home to fulfill my obligation.

06:47 Venerable Miao You

So, in those days, my mother used to run a shop, like an electrical appliances, like Bing Lee. But of course not that big haha. Hmm, so, it was my duty to come home and look after the shop in the afternoon. So, that that was difficult in those years.

07:13 Venerable Miao You

Hmm, it was late in the 60s. So, there was not a lot of money around. So, I, even though, I went to one of the best schools in Singapore, Raffles Girls Secondary School, I achieved very good results and all that, but I never actually studied HSC because I think I, my mum didn't say that but I thought I should stop studying and then go to work.

07:46 Venerable Miao You

So, I worked in our shop for two years and at the age of 17 and a half or 18, I actually went and got a good job. Hmm, so, I was at the nighttime, I went to study: accounting, bookkeeping and all that sort of things.

08:05 Venerable Miao You

And at the age 18, I worked in an Australian company and they sell Ford motor cars. So, and I think that's what brought my interest, you know, to cars and things like that. So, this Australian company have a lot of Australians coming and I think my preference to migrate to Australia was because I thought, gee, Australia is not a bad country and the people are very friendly.

08:38 Venerable Miao You

Hmm, it's not too far from Singapore. I can always visit, you know, my parents and family and then that's why I decided that, for me, to really do something about my life, I should migrate to Australia. And at that time, I saw in the papers that there were, they have a shortage of secretaries and accounting, nurses and all these, you know, some profession.

09:09 Venerable Miao You

So, I decided I should apply. And, so they offered me permanent residence straight away and say that I have to migrate and take up their offer within 12 months. And so, in 1978, I came to Australia.

09:31 Venerable Jue Fang

So, that was you were very young when you first came to Australia. What was Australia like at that time? How old were you?

09:38 Venerable Miao You

1978, I would be 24, I think, 24, 25. Hmm, Australia was still very country-like, you know, like Singapore was very robust and busy and all that. Hmm, I remember that Australia, that time, it was under the Liberal government, so people were very approachable, friendly, and under the Liberal government, there were some rules for them to accept you as a permanent resident.

10:22 Venerable Miao You

And one of the rules was that you cannot apply for the Dole. In other words, you can't take Social Security because you haven't offered and contribute to the economy yet. So how can you take away from the Australian if you haven't contributed?

10:40 Venerable Miao You

So, I remember that was one of the rules and regulation. However, we did have our Medicare card. Hmm, so when I came to Australia in '78, it was still a very much patriarchal country. So, for me to apply for a loan was almost impossible because you're single, you don't have a husband, in case you fall pregnant, who's going to pay the loan?

11:19 Venerable Miao You

So, that's what they're worried about. So, I actually managed to save something like \$3,000 before I came to Australia, and the currency rate was very high. Australian dollar was very high. So, my money is almost like nothing.

11:42 Venerable Miao You

Hmm, I managed to find a job, pretty much within two weeks. I took whatever job I can get, and I worked in a company that service telephones. And after two or three months, I went to another job, and somebody introduced me to a mining company.

12:09 Venerable Miao You

And that was when I started my journey on mining. And I guess a lot of my experience from that mining company has helped me in the development of Nan Tien Institute at the later stage. Hmm, there weren't a lot of people in in Australia.

12:33 Venerable Miao You

The job market was, you know, just like pick the job you want kind of thing, and you can go for any job you want. The pay wasn't bad because things are cheap. Everything, we used to use dollar and cents. So, things are 99 cents, and then they still give you one cent back.

12:59 Venerable Miao You

So, this one cent, though you can't buy anything, one cent, but five cents can buy you something. So, the cost of living was low, and even though I, like, didn't get, you know, the highest pay or something, but life was very good.

13:21 Venerable Miao You

So, nothing nothing cost too much, like, until when I get into the housing market. The housing market was going up very quickly, like a thousand dollars a week, you know, houses and units going up very quickly. So, within one year, I actually bought myself a unit.

13:45 Venerable Miao You

Not a unit, sorry. I bought myself a house, though it's very far away, in Revesby. It's now what you call Revesby. So, I, I bought a house within one year, and I stayed there for two years. And after that, I sold it, and I made a profit, and I sort of upgrade myself.

14:07 Venerable Miao You

So, every two years or so, I would move to another place. So, I'm a mover all the time. My mum keeps saying, why you move again? So, and that's because, you know, I'm I'm starting to find security in Australia to to, so that I can feel more settled.

14:39 Venerable Jue Fang

So, how did you get into, be involved in the Nan Tien Temple? Because you were not born in a Buddhist family. How, when did you begin your interest in Buddhism?

14:52 Venerable Miao You

Hmm, it was actually by accident that I come across Buddhism. Hmm, what I say, I, I took a wrong turn. I took a wrong turn. I was going to go to a car park in Sussex Street, but I miss, somehow I miss that entrance.

15:20 Venerable Miao You

And so, there's no way of coming back. So, I have, I have to take another place. I have to find another place to park my car. And so, I ended up in Sussex Street and walking back to the place where I was going to have my meeting.

15:39 Venerable Miao You

Hmm, the, and I come across 382 Sussex Street, which is our city branch, which is Fo Guang Shan³'s city branch. And it was a very strange kind of window. The window, the window display was very strange.

16:06 Venerable Miao You

And I looked and looked at it. I was wondering what sort of shop this is. Is it a shop that sells Buddhist, you know, artifacts or or what? Because there was all sorts of things in there.

16:24 Venerable Miao You

So, that was a time that I went in. I, I didn't get in. I didn't go in because it was too early. The shop is not opened yet, but I, I told myself that, oh, on the way back, I must come in and have a look. And so, I went in after my meeting and the first thing I saw was the Buddha. The Buddha statues are all around.

16:51 Venerable Miao You

Then there was a beads and bracelets and everything. And the lady that was there said, we have a shrine upstairs. And so, I did, I went up to the shrine and have a look, but there was one Reverend there, but she didn't pay attention to me.

17:09 Venerable Miao You

And then she was like, talking to other people. So, I went up and then I came back down again and there was a a little kind of like a restaurant. And so, I ordered myself some vegetarian food and I sat there.

17:24 Venerable Miao You

And while I was sitting, I saw a book, it call *Lotus in the Stream*, okay, by Master Hsing Yun⁴. So today, that book is out of order. It changes title to, like, *The Core Teachings*. So, I bought that book and I also bought another book by K. Sri Dhammananda.

³ Founded in 1967 by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, Fo Guang Shan is a global Buddhist Order headquartered in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, with over 300 branch monasteries around the world.

⁴ Born in 1927 in Jiangdu, Jiangsu Province, China, Venerable Master Hsing Yun was the founder of Fo Guang Shan (Buddha's Light Mountain) Buddhist Order and dedicated his life to propagating Humanistic Buddhism. He passed away at the age of 97, on February 5, 2023.

17:45 Venerable Miao You

It was called *The Gems of Wisdom*. And when I picked up that book, it answered all my questions about life. And so, I bought that book, two books and a CD. So, the CD has a very uplifting tune to it.

18:08 Venerable Miao You

And it's called, I think the *Dharani of Compassion*, but it is sung in Tibetan. And when I listened to that tune, I really, I felt really quite calm and like my spirit sort of uplifted. And so that's when I, I went home and the lady at the shop says to me that there is a place called Nan Tien Temple in the South Coast.

18:37 Venerable Miao You

You know it. And I said, I think I saw it in the newspaper, but I have not been there. And she said in a couple of weeks, there is a big celebration at the Nan Tien Temple. It's called Ullambana or Sangha Offering, but I didn't know what it is.

18:59 Venerable Miao You

And I said, Oh yeah, yeah, yeah okay. So, I just like listened, but I sort of half hear and half not hear it. But on that day, I make a note, and on that day, I actually felt like, I maybe I should take a drive down to South Coast.

19:16 Venerable Miao You

And I went, but I got lost. I went to Wollongong instead, but anyway I found my way to the Nan Tien Temple. I was like 10 minutes late for my, whatever the function was. And so, the moment I entered the Nan Tien Temple, in my car, I started to cry and I started this, hmm, to have this sense of belonging.

19:41 Venerable Miao You

Like, I found this place, I found home, you know, it's a, it's a feeling like I've returned home. And so, I parked the car and I went up to the main shrine and they were chanting already. So, I didn't know what they were chanting, but I cried some more.

20:01 Venerable Miao You

So, I just keep crying. I didn't know what it was all about. So, in those days, when they were doing the offering, they have an alms bowl or something, but I don't have cash. I never carry much cash. I have a \$20 note, I just put \$20.

20:20 Venerable Miao You

And then they they didn't accept credit cards or anything. So, I went home. And then I was thinking, what was that about? Like, you know, I, I have a very strange feeling when I came to the temple, which never happened to me before.

20:37 Venerable Miao You

And it's like my whole spirit have come home to this spiritual home. And I finally have found where I should belong. So, the way I can describe it is like, when a child went to a trade fair or a, or a carnival and then you've lost your mum.

21:04 Venerable Miao You

And then you are so frightened, you know, when you lost your mum, you don't see them and you're so scared. And then suddenly when you see your mum coming towards you, you know that feeling that you've got, you'll be so happy.

21:17 Venerable Miao You

And that was the feeling I've got when I drove into the Nan Tien Temple. So, and my, my journey back here was like, somehow, I always need to come back. It's like, that's the connection. And so, every few weeks, whenever I have time, I come back to the temple just to look around and then I joined a few retreats here.

21:47 Venerable Miao You

They have the Eastern Awareness Retreat and the Meditation Retreat. And after I joined all these retreats a few times, so you start to see, they are going to be the same. You know, what else can I do here?

22:02 Venerable Miao You

So, I see that there are volunteers here. And I started to think, ah, I can become a volunteer too. So, I signed up for the volunteers. And when I come to stay at the pilgrim lodge, you know, I'm so full of like, anticipation and I'm so excited, you know.

22:27 Venerable Miao You

And then when I go home, it's always so sad. I used to cry on the way home. It's like, you know, I don't want to go home, you know. And then, and it comes a time that that you're more comfortable in the temple, inside, even though it's kind of all enclosed and you do all the things that you're not used to.

22:56 Venerable Miao You

You, you are interacting with a community that half the time you don't even understand what they're talking about. But I felt more comfortable here than outside. And at the end of the year, so I, I was a volunteer in many places, in a few places.

23:17 Venerable Miao You

Hmm, my first place that I served was the information centre. And then later I went to the gift shop. So that in those days, there were not very many books by Master Hsing Yun in English. But every time there was an Australian or a Westerner, I always introduce a book to them.

23:44 Venerable Miao You

In those days, we have the wisdom, *The Words of Wisdom* by Master Hsing Yun, a little pocket books, volume one and two. So, I, I always introduce those books to them. I can sell like 10, 20 books a day. So, the gift shop, they're very happy when I go there because they'd be able to sell many books.

24:11 Venerable Miao You

And so that was my introduction to Buddhism. And because I don't know anything about Buddhism, so what I read was actually, even though it was new to me, but it's also, I had a feeling that I always knew that.

24:32 Venerable Miao You

And I said to myself, hey, how come? I've been a Buddhist all my life, but I actually don't know it. So, this was my introduction to Buddhism and it's through Master Hsing Yun's books, his ability to express in such an ordinary, layman's terms that I really understood Buddhism.

25:05 Venerable Jue Fang

So, what made you become a monastic?

25:09 Venerable Miao You

Because I felt more comfortable in here, in the temple, than out there. And also, I understand that it is probably a natural progression of my life journey. Because in a way, I have achieved everything I want, right, in my life.

25:31 Venerable Miao You

So, when I was ready to take the monastic route, I was nearly, I'm probably 48 years old or something like that. And so that's nothing else for me to achieve anymore. You know, I don't have to prove to anybody.

25:50 Venerable Miao You

And so, therefore, I, I thought it would be a good thing for me to do, because then I can connect with my roots. So, in a way, um, in a way, because like, for example, you see, in Singapore, even though it's a sort of Asian community.

26:23 Venerable Miao You

But when you go to an English school, and in my early years, I used to go to the Bible study. I don't know much about Chinese, Chinese history or even Asian philosophy or Eastern philosophy. So, coming to the temple also gave me another insight, you know, into myself.

26:55 Venerable Miao You

Hmm, and that's why I thought that being in an Asian community is also back to my roots.

27:05 Venerable Jue Fang

So, could you tell us more about your things that you did for ordination or how did you prepare yourself to become a monastic and finally become one?

27:22 Venerable Miao You

Hmm, that was in 2001, in late 2001. So, during, I came into the temple in 1999, then 2000, and then 2001. So, at the end of 2001, I usually, at the end of the year in December, I would visit my family in Singapore, and that's when I went to Singapore in December 2001 after the short-term monastic retreat.

27:59 Venerable Miao You

So, I've done three short-term monastic retreats. So, with the help of like, translation and all that. So, I'm getting used to the culture, and when when I left, after I left, someone from the temple phoned me and said that next month there would be an ordination in Fo Guang Shan.

28:24 Venerable Miao You

So, do you want to take the ordination? And then it's almost like, well, the Buddha knows what I was thinking, it's like, because at the last monastic retreat, I said to myself that, hey, I'm I am actually ready, you know, to be a monastic, but nobody heard that, except maybe the Buddha.

28:51 Venerable Miao You

And then that opportunity arise arose, and so I thought, hey, it's it's probably a good idea for me to take that short-term monastic retreat. So, I came back. I shortened my holidays.

I came back to Australia, and I literally had six weeks to pack up my life and go to Fo Guang Shan in January, in January 2002.

29:23 Venerable Miao You

So, in these six weeks, you know, I have all my possessions and my house, my car, my shares, everything. So, I sold, gave away, and do whatever I need to, so that I can clear myself of all these attachments, so I can go to the Fo Guang Shan monastery.

29:50 Venerable Miao You

So, the only thing I've got that I wasn't able to do in the six weeks was the unit that I lived in, Rose Bay, and so I got an accountant whom I don't know, I don't know who he is. I've never had any, I never had any interaction with him, he wasn't my accountant, because my accountant just died, like, and somebody said, like, you know, he's a good man, he can look after your property and all these things.

30:19 Venerable Miao You

So, I just trusted it, and so I gave him my power attorney for everything, like my house, my unit, shares, whatever. I said, look, I can't deal with this anymore, so can you look after it? And that was it.

30:39 Venerable Miao You

So, I do believe that, you know, when conditions are right, everything will be right for you. So, it was appropriate, it was the right time for me to take this monastic route, and so everything falls into place.

30:56 Venerable Miao You

So, I'm a great believer of, like, cause and conditions. So, the conditions are right, so everything will be right. I mean, this guy is still around, he's about the same age as me, and he's the most honest man that you can find.

31:16 Venerable Jue Fang

So, could you tell us more about your experience as a monastic in Taiwan? How was the ceremony like and what did you do after that?

31:28 Venerable Miao You

Hmm, I think Fo Guang Shan had different, different aspirations for us, or different views. I am one of six, sort of older, or more elder monastics, so I'm not 18 or 25 or whatever. So normally, Fo Guang Shan would not accept anyone older than 36 years old, but I was already 48 or something.

32:04 Venerable Miao You

So, some monastics would say, oh, you're too old, you should not be, you know, ordained now. But I was, probably, whether lucky is the word, or had the affinity with Master Hsing Yun, I was accepted as a monastic.

32:24 Venerable Miao You

And so, they didn't put me in the, into the Buddhist college, because when you, you have to study for three or four years, and then you'll be in your 50s, and that's too late, according to them. And so, we were put under a different program for escalation so that you can quickly graduate as a monastic and know and learn and do all the things that you're required to do in your monastic life.

33:02 Venerable Miao You

So, besides meditation, I went to Lan Yang Bie Yuan (蘭陽別院), which is up in the north, Yilan. So, I think I learned all the things that I need to learn in 10 weeks. You learned to cook, you learned chanting, you learned how to do your morning and evening chanting, you know, the offering to the sentient beings and all that.

33:40 Venerable Miao You

But I had a big problem, because I cannot read the Chinese, so I had a partner. She, someone can read the Chinese, and I can do the actions. So, we managed, and we have lessons even in construction, and how to take care and maintain a temple.

34:05 Venerable Miao You

And so, when the, when the monastic teacher gave us the lessons and write and read on the board, but I will be taking notes in English, because I can understand Chinese, but I can't write. So, I'll be writing in English, so in a way, I was doing translation.

34:30 Venerable Miao You

So, people are very fascinated with like, what is she doing here? You know, anyway, the 10 weeks prepared me to do like, you know, all the cooking. One of the greater lessons I learned is copying the menu. So, when you cook, right, you not only learn how to cook, you actually have to write, copy the menu, because in that way, you will understand and know what goes with what.

35:04 Venerable Miao You

Right, otherwise, you are entirely sort of lost. And I really appreciate that lesson, because I didn't understand in the beginning why I have to copy, because I can't write Chinese, right? So copying is a big thing for me.

35:21 Venerable Miao You

They said, no, you do what you're asked to do. So, I learned to accept instructions, even though you don't understand the intention behind it. So, that's also a great lesson for me. And I know it pays off later on, because when you are asked to cook yourself, you will know what goes with what, because you have copied it in full.

35:48 Venerable Miao You

Whatever you write in goes into your mind. And everything else was like strange. So, in Yilan, a lot of the devotees are the local, local Taiwanese people, so they don't actually speak Mandarin. They speak like Taiwanese dialect.

36:14 Venerable Miao You

And I catch some and I miss some, so I had a lot of accidents happened because of my inability to fully understand the instructions. But it's all quite fun. So, I also learned to laugh at your own mistakes. And I think this is what had, you know, helped me to to accept myself and to grow.

36:44 Venerable Jue Fang

So, when did you come back to Australia and the Nan Tien Temple and what did you do after that?

36:51 Venerable Miao You

I came back in 2003. Hmm, I was asked to do all the things that I expected of you, like, as though you know everything. So, I teach the excursions, Tai Chi, meditation, and like, I was lucky I was in the meditation college for about three months.

37:24 Venerable Miao You

And yeah, it was a very high learning curve because there isn't much teaching here to say this is what you do. So, I guess I am a very good observer. Within a few days, I had to lead all the Tai Chi classes.

37:54 Venerable Miao You

So, we used to have a lot of school excursions as well. And I could do up to like, maybe four or five groups a day. So, I do four or five times Tai Chi a day, so I get very fit. And the meditation sessions, to run the meditation session for half an hour is not a problem.

38:22 Venerable Miao You

But when you are asked to run the whole retreat by yourself, yeah, that can be very challenging. So, I don't know how I actually prepare for it. But I think at the time when I

was put on the spot to teach the participants, I just felt that, you know, all the words just rolled out. It's as though someone is doing the talking, not me.

38:51 Venerable Miao You

So, it came very easily. And I, I do believe that there's such a thing called Dharma joy, and also the greatest gift of all is the Dharma gift.

39:08 Venerable Jue Fang

So, what else were you involved in, apart from teaching meditation or Tai Chi?

39:15 Venerable Miao You

Hmm, I did all the accounting back in, in the back office, the administration. We have four or five bank accounts, and all the books were written, was handwritten, not computerised. So, there was no MYOB yet in those days.

39:41 Venerable Miao You

So, they have a Kalamazoo system, you know, that you can't copy, probably never heard of it. And yeah, you have to physically reconcile everything. And then you have to report to head office. And at that time, I was also doing the parameters books.

40:08 Venerable Miao You

So, there wasn't a lot of time, free time. You could say that I made use of, you know, every five minutes of my day to complete all the task that was assigned to me. And then in the meantime, I read a lot, not just Buddhist books, but also self-help psychology books, just to make the comparison between Western psychology and Buddhist psychology.

40:53 Venerable Miao You

So, like all these aspects of Buddhist thinking and that, so I learned, I learned from books, I learned myself.

41:08 Venerable Jue Fang

You were also very involved in community events. Could you tell us more about that?

41:14 Venerable Miao You

Those days, I think we started community events in 2006 or 2007. So, in the first few years, it was mainly the teaching, and excursions and sort of serving all the schools and the people who comes for the retreats.

41:40 Venerable Miao You

Then in 2006 or 2007, I think under Abbess Yi Lai and she found that, like, she had a big job of developing the Nan Tien site to build the Nan Tien Institute, to build an institute of Higher Education. And she found that there was like nothing at all there.

42:04 Venerable Miao You

So really, besides the site, the land which we know was contaminated, there was nothing much that we can work on. And so, she got me involved in the project. And after speaking to our consultants and contractors, we actually had a master plan.

42:28 Venerable Miao You

So, the master plan was already done. Hmm, but the remediation was the difficult part to get going. Because of the lack of knowledge, I think, from our own community, our own Sangha community, not a lot of understanding or decision has to make as to what should be done.

42:59 Venerable Miao You

And with the help of our devotees, Cecilia Mun, myself and other consultants, we actually have more regular meetings. I think one of the reasons why we didn't do in the past is because every time we have a meeting, it would cost, like, more than ten thousand dollars because each meeting cost money and the consultants are not prepared to give you the time for free.

43:32 Venerable Miao You

And so, decisions have to be made, otherwise you'll be wasting your money. And so, I think that pushes us to make the decisions and to find a way of developing this Nan Tien Institute. So, as you know, the site was sold to us for a dollar.

44:00 Venerable Miao You

The reason why the council sold it to us is because the legal consideration has passed, and the land is yours and you can't give it back. So, they could easily have given us the land and say, this is a gift for you.

44:19 Venerable Miao You

But then if we find that we have, we cannot meet the conditions, then we can give it back. But so clearly the council didn't want it back. They have no way of developing this land. So, we are stuck with it, see.

44:36 Venerable Miao You

So, and but it was master's vision that if we have that land across the freeway, we can build a university and we can build a bridge. So that was, that was his vision, his aspiration for the Nan Tien Temple.

44:56 Venerable Miao You

So, for us to really localise in Australia. So that was his vision. And so, in the 2006, so we started a lot of, made a lot of enquiries from different contractors, consultants and that. And we found out that that piece of land had more rubbish and contamination than Homebush Bay, which is, which we build the Olympic Park, you know, the Olympics and they only build like, tracks, you know, and gardens.

45:44 Venerable Miao You

But we want to build a building. So, for us to build a building, we have to go quite deep. Now we have to make sure that the contamination do not flow into the neighbouring sites to contaminate the water system and all that.

46:03 Venerable Miao You

So, it was very different from like the Homebush Bay. So, these consultants come in and said that and we also got the services of a site auditor. We had geotechnical services. We had Cardno⁵, which is a civil construction and engineering. So, we have every engineering services involved to help us realise the dream of Master Hsing Yun.

46:41 Venerable Miao You

And the fact that it was such a difficult site and also involves a lot of cost and money, and that's why I think they did not start in the very beginning. But building is one thing, and the other side, the other part of it is the Nan Tien Institute, how do we start a higher education provider, get the accreditation or the license when you have nothing.

47:23 Venerable Miao You

So, that is the other aspects of the Nan Tien Institute.

47:29 Venerable Jue Fang

So, you were involved in both aspects, the construction and also the setting up of the Institute.

47:36 Venerable Miao You

Yes, the initial setting up, the accreditation, the application to the Department of Education. Hmm, at that time, we didn't have TEQSA yet. So, it's just Department of

⁵ A civil engineering consulting company.

Education, New South Wales. The application took a long time because we don't know how to start, whether we should be a higher education provider or whether we start as a, what they call, RTO, which is, what the RTO⁶ stands for? Registered.

48:19 Venerable Jue Fang

Tertiary?

48:24 Venerable Miao You

I think it's more like trade, you know, it's like you can learn to, you learn accounting. I think it's what they call a vocational, V-E-T now, it's called vocational-educational. So, we explore in many different areas, but in the end, they say that it's actually easier if we just go the higher education route.

48:53 Venerable Miao You

Hmm, so we ask many people. We even ask a MP to help. So, he introduced us to one of his friends who had his own private college. Um, you know how people always take the advantage of us if they can. They try and rip us off and saying that we have to pay like, two or three hundred thousand dollars, even to start, and which we didn't.

49:31 Venerable Miao You

So, in the end, it was from, you could say, good conditions or building good affinity with our students, the participants from the retreats and all that, that introduced Professor John Loxton to us because he was working in Macquarie University at that time.

49:57 Venerable Miao You

And then, but he, he just, whether he resigned or terminated his position in Macquarie University or not, so he was available. And so, he helped us to apply for the accreditation for higher education provider.

50:18 Venerable Miao You

And we have to have the curriculum all written up and also a business plan. So, in those days, we didn't have a lot of people. I think I spent a couple of hours explaining to Professor John Loxton what it's all about.

50:39 Venerable Miao You

You know, why does Master Hsing Yun wants to have a higher education institution in Australia? And I think he sees that as, like a vacuum in the higher education industry for us to enter, enter that, what do you call, how do you say, if, now he sees it as a right time

⁶ RTO stood for Registered Training Organisation.

for us to enter this higher education field because there is none, that there wasn't anything there.

51:26 Venerable Miao You

And we also want to do it to localise Australia⁷ and to localise the Nan Tien Temple and to build better humanity, affinity with the local Australians.

51:54 Venerable Jue Fang

Thank you, Venerable Miao You. We will take a break.

⁷ A slip of the tongue, what Venerable Miao You would like to express is that "we wanted to do it to localise Buddhism to Australia. We need to use the Nan Tien Temple to build better affinity with the local community."