Claude AnShin Thomas Biography

Claude Age 12

Claude AnShin Thomas was born in rural, Northwestern Pennsylvania in November of 1947. He began the practice of Zen through his study of Martial Arts (Hop Ki Do) in 1961. He graduated from High School in 1965. Upon graduation he enlisted in the United States Army, completed his training and volunteered for duty in Vietnam where he served as a helicopter Crew Chief from September of 1966 to November of 1967.

During his service in Vietnam he was shot down on 5 separate occasions and wounded. He was honorably discharged from the US Army in August of 1968.

Claude Army

During the next several years he was to complete a Bachelor of Science degree in English Education and complete the majority of course work towards a Master of Fine Arts in English (concentrating on creative writing). All of this education was at Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania.
He then wandered about Europe, Asia, and the Far East before returning back to the United States to pursue a musical career that spanned 11 years, yielding 4 independent albums of what has been defined as Socially Conscious Rock and Roll.

Throughout this period of his life he was also very politically and socially active working to end the war in Vietnam, for student rights and later to address the plight of many of his fellow veterans who were being socially ostracized suffering homelessness, drug addiction, unemployability, social isolation, and abnormally high rates of suicide, divorce, and imprisonment. All conditions with which he was intimately aware and personally familiar.

He also began the study of another Martial Art, Shaolin Kung Fu. He became a Master in this tradition as well as Hop Ki Do, teaching (at one point) as many as 500 students. During this time Claude also attended and graduated from Lesley College in Cambridge, MA with a Masters Degree in Management (MSM).

In 1991 he came in contact with the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh. In this process Claude became a member of the Vietnamese monastery and retreat center, Plum Village in southern France founded and guided by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh becoming awake to the devastating and lasting effects of war and how to make peace with this unpeacefulness (healing).

Claude speaks and leads retreats internationally on mindfulness practice, transformation, and reconciliation. He has worked for Peace in the Balkans and participated in a Pilgrimage for Peace with the Venerable Brother Sasamori Shonin of the Nippozen Myohoji lineage of the Japanese Nichiren Order. This pilgrimage began in Auschwitz, Poland in...

Claude was ordained a Zen Priest, AnShin AnGyo, in August of 1995 by Roshi Bernie Glassman, founder of the Greyston Foundation, NYC. Claude is active in creating and working for socially engaged projects serving the disenfranchised, speaks publicly on the subjects of peace, non-violence, and the waking up to and healing of suffering, both personal and collective, and leads Mindfulness Retreats throughout the world.

On March 1, 1998, Claude began a New York to California cross-country journey, which was completed July 29, 1998. This Pilgrimage is known as the American Zen Pilgrimage (see "The Practice"). The pilgrims practiced the ancient Buddhist tradition of takahatsu, or alms-begging, with the main focus of the journey being the Three Core Tenets of the Zen Peacemaker Order: penetrating the unknown, bearing witness, and healing.

He is also founder of the ZALTHO FOUNDATION, a non-profit organization whose purpose is to promote peace and nonviolence in and among individuals, families, societies, and countries supporting all efforts to attain this goal through whatever peaceful and nonviolent means available.

Claude AnShin is currently finishing writing a book with the title 'At Hell's Gate', release date 12 September 2004, Shambhala Publications, Inc.

At Hell's Gate

Please look at the schedule for the upcoming book tour.
"Claude Anshin Thomas's journey from the killing fields of Vietnam to the path of peace and pilgrimage testifies to his -- and our -- powerful urge to awaken. At the same time, this is not a pretty story. Anshin Thomas has lived in hell, knows its smell and taste, and continues to confront it every day of his life. Yet he remains undeterred in his work to make peace in himself and the world at large."

-- Bernie Glassman, author of Instructions to the Cook and Bearing Witness

"At Hell's Gate" is a powerful, wise, and genuinely profound spiritual odyssey from the insanity of violence (in the world, within ourselves, and in the assumptions of American culture) to the peace and compassion of Mindfulness practice. Claude AnShin Thomas beautifully models the Dharma in his daily life, and by doing so he enlightens and liberates us all."

-- Charles Johnson, author of "Middle Passage" and "Turning the Wheel"
At Hell’s Gate will soon be available for pre-ordering from both Shambhala Press and Amazon.Com

"Claude Anshin Thomas was the heart and soul of my film Peace is Every Step, the key to the audienceís connection to Thich Nhat Hahnís path of peace making. An authentic American voice speaking from the depth of his wartime experience, Claude offers a message that needs to be heard in these troubled times."

-- Gaetano Maida, a Founding Director of Tricycle Magazine and Director of Peace Is Every Step: The Life and Work of Thich Nhat Hahn

"In these strange times, when fear and aggression often seem to be the only responses we can imagine to a perceived threat, this powerful book provides an honest, open-hearted, and very moving testimony to the power of Buddhist practice to break this cycle. Claude Anshin Thomas is a hero in the truest sense of the word: having undergone an epic trial, he has generously come back to help others in need."

-- George Saunders AUTHOR OF "PASTORALIS" & "CIVILWARLAND IN BAD DECLINE"

"Claude Anshin Thomas is a unique and dedicated man who has lived on many edges and invites those around him to do the same. His journey has not been an easy one: from soldier to dharma explorer, and his great determination has touched the lives of many."

-- Joan Halifax Roshi

This is a book of great power. Claude Anshin Thomas's pilgrimage to find living peace in a world full of terror and war gives us a wonderfully practical lesson in how to lift ourselves out of the insanity of fear, hatred, violence and trauma. His singularly courageous story has the power to heal, to inspire, to teach.

-- John Laurence, Author of "THE CATS FROM HUE"

Claude Anshin Thomas has been an inspiration to me. Our world urgently needs to listen to him tell of his life in war and then in peace.
-- Maxine Hong-Kingston, Author of "Trip Master Monkey"

"Written with relentless courage and utter compassion, this account of violence and transformation is one of the most amazing and wonderful
stories I've ever read."

--Michael Herr, author of Dispatches

"Claude Anshin Thomas has written a courageous and vivid account of the inner meaning of war. His experiences as a soldier in Vietnam are recounted with a ruthless honesty that both heightens the horror of the deaths he witnessed and inflicted and allows us a glimpse into a soldier's tormented heart. His story of coming to terms with his violent past by means of Buddhist practice provides a moving example of how even the most extreme forms of suffering can be understood, accepted and transformed into a path of wisdom and love."

-- Stephen Batchelor, author of *Buddhism Without Beliefs*