

Obituaries

Lama Zopa Rinpoche requests that “students who read Mandala pray that the students whose obituaries follow find a perfect human body, meet a Mahayana guru and become enlightened quickly, or be born in a pure land where the teachings exist and they can become enlightened.” Reading these obituaries also helps us reflect upon our own death and rebirth – and so use our lives in the most meaningful way.

Advice and Practices for Death and Dying is available from the Foundation Store www.fpmt.org/shop



**Terry Leach, 59,
died in Coromandel,
New Zealand,
February 28, 2007**

By Murray Wright

On February 28 we witnessed the passing of a fine Dharma brother and excellent practitioner. Born in England, Terry grew up in Canada and obtained a Ph.D. in Geology in New Zealand where he settled. He was an internationally-respected geologist who utilized opportunities presented by his work to help others and pursue his love of the Dharma.

While researching his thesis, Terry began searching for something not to be found through drugs and wild living, and spent many hours discussing philosophy and religion. He met Lama Zopa Rinpoche at a course near Auckland in 1976, and fell in love with Tibetan Buddhism. In those early years of Dorje Chang Institute, Terry and his partner Naomi's flat became the focus for Dharma gatherings.

In 1979 Terry took Lama Yeshe's Tara Cittamani initiation and retreat at Noojee outside Melbourne, engendering in him a life-long love and practice of Tara. During and between geology expeditions, Terry attended Dharma events with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and other lamas such as Geshe Tashi Tsering. He so admired the great stupa at Borobodur

in Java that he commissioned life-sized carved stone replicas of the five Dayani Buddhas and smaller reliefs of the Buddha's life story. During the past seven years, while director, he offered a number of these images to Mahamudra Centre. Under his loving management and fiscal generosity, the center developed markedly. In particular he organized a hut with a large stone carving of Dorje Khadro for fire pujas, a well to provide a reliable water supply, and a modern ablution block.

Spurred on by aggressive throat cancer and the awareness of impermanence, Terry did intensive practice before an operation last September. He never regained his physical strength, but always remained with a contented mind and big smile focused on the Guru and the Dharma, even while in pain. Lovingly cared for by his family, his home radiated peace and love, leaving a marked impression on all visitors. His desire was fulfilled when he took *rabjung* ordination with Khensur Jampa Tegchok just three weeks before he died, and aptly received the name of Jampa Tashi (Fortunate Love).

In accordance with Buddhist practice, Terry's body was left undisturbed for three days while lamas and Dharma siblings around the world did prayers. Following a moving funeral at Mahamudra Centre on the Day of Miracles (March 3), his body was cremated and the ashes blessed with appropriate rituals

prior to being made into tsa tsas and stupas.

Terry's life was an inspiring example of how we can extract the essence by integrating Dharma into our life and death and benefit others while actively working in the world.



**Han Juan Kiat, 60,
died in Singapore,
March 5, 2007**

By Cecilia Tsong

No one is quite sure how Han Juan Kiat's association with Amitabha Buddhist Centre (ABC) began. Some members said he told them he had started coming to the center in its very early days when it was operating out of a private home at Butterfly Avenue fifteen years ago.

But, somehow, he never became a member until he was advised to attend the Sunday morning prayers, which included the purification practice of Confession to the 35 Buddhas. After doing this for some time, he signed up as a life member of the center.

Han became a regular at many of the ABC functions and teachings by the lamas. He will always be remembered for his immaculate grooming – no sloppy T-shirts and jeans for him. He was always smartly turned out in a crisp white shirt and slacks. And he had charming, gentlemanly manners, a lost art in these

modern times. He was also extremely respectful of all the lamas and was particularly devoted to and had great faith in our resident geshe, Geshe Chonyi.

He was a deeply private man. Very few people at the center knew of his family background or his deteriorating physical condition as his lung cancer advanced. Estranged from his family, he had to be moved from his home to a nursing facility, and when his condition got worse, he finally entered a hospice in January 2006.

Various members all chipped in to help drive him to teachings and to our special gatherings and events, which he was always eager to attend despite being hooked up to a mobile oxygen unit. Others visited him on a regular basis, as did Geshe Chonyi.

In the few months preceding his death, he became increasingly fearful, needing the physical comfort of having people around him all the time. One volunteer, Yam Khoon, who had been visiting him faithfully every evening after work for months on end, even slept in his room overnight to keep him company.

When the end came, his regular caregivers were all present. Geshe-la arrived soon after to do prayers for him. The next day at his wake, many of his Dharma friends came to pray for him and to say their last goodbyes. Geshe-la also made extensive prayers for him before his cremation.

Han's final wish was for his ashes to be scattered at sea. Coincidentally, that very weekend of his cremation, some members had organized an animal liberation at sea, so his wish was fulfilled. Also, a very kind volunteer took some of his ashes to be scattered in the grounds of the Mahabodhi Stupa at Bodhgaya. We think that would have made Han very happy.



**Elaine Otene, 61,
died in
Auckland,
New Zealand on
March 29, 2007**

By Murray Wright

Elaine was an unusual Dharma student. The youngest of thirteen children, she was born into a Maori tribe from Northland. The Maoris have strong bonds with the land, their ancestors, and extended family, plus they have rich healing traditions. Not many have shown interest in studying and practicing Buddhism. Elaine was different. She had enjoyed an active life including karate, overseas travel, dance and poker machines, five children, and two grandchildren. With much love, humor, and delicious cooking she cared for everyone.

In 2004, Elaine sensed she was unwell. She stumbled across Dorje Chang Institute [Auckland] when she spotted the stupa while on a shortcut to the grocery store. She quickly decided that Buddhism was her path, taking refuge and teachings from Geshe Wangchen. Diagnosed with lung cancer, Elaine came to Tara pujas and Friday night Medicine Buddha pujas, wrote the Sanghata Sutra, and helped at working bees. These practices gave her strength to cope with her illness and uncomfortable treatments.

Not all of her family accepted her faith, which became particularly challenging at her death. Elaine was determined to die in the Buddhist tradition. These wishes and Geshela's guidance were followed exactly by her partner and son. In her last days she was surrounded by Dharma images, sounds, and advice. Her home emanated a peaceful and uplifting atmosphere, which affected all visitors.

After her passing, family and friends were requested not to touch her body, as is the Maori custom, nor to weep openly nearby. This was difficult for some, but tensions dissolved when, after two days, clear signs emerged that the consciousness had left. Family was then able to grieve according to their custom. Following her funeral, in which prayers to be reborn in Maitreya's paradise and Shantideva's dedications were read, the family said they were very happy with the Buddhist way of dying.

**Brian Baumgarten, 48,
died in Minnesota on April 7, 2007**

By Sheila Duddy, RN

Brian was a patient of mine in our Hospice Unit. He had a "pontine stroke" which left him completely



Brian with lamas from the Gyuto Wheel of Dharma monastery in Minneapolis

paralyzed. We were able to communicate one word at a time, and I realized he desired spiritual support with respect to Buddhism. I provided him with the beginnings of a shrine in his hospital room, and when he was transferred out to the Hospice Residence his parents brought his vajra and bell to his room. According to his parents, they only then "found out" that he was a practicing Buddhist.

They told me he lived in Japan for six years and wandered through Korea, China, and Thailand. He asked if I could support him for the forty-nine

days after he died. He knew to request no movement of his body for three days prior to his cremation. He told me he had read *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* at least six times. He was a Tai Chi instructor for a while: Some of his students came to visit him in the hospital. They said he was a quiet guy but he could listen well and he was very intelligent.

He told me (with great effort) that we were “partners on the path.” He cried when I told him about the Dalai Lama and the FPMT Prayers for the Dead connection. This group supported my parents when they died and provided me with *mani* pills which I shared with Brian a week before he died. I talked to him over the phone several days before he died and encouraged him to practice *tonglen* with his breathing. He seemed to know what I was talking about, and so I concluded that he had studied, contemplated, and practiced Buddhism for a while. I never got the answer as to any lama or guru that he studied under. Close to the time of his death he received the *amrta* pill and blessed sand from the Bardo Death Pack that I gave to him. I didn’t know much more than that about his life, yet I know we had a profound spiritual connection during his last two weeks on earth. He is survived by his mother and father and stepfather, who I met at his deathbed. They were the only family I knew who visited him.

The entire staff at the North Memorial Hospital Hospice unit and the Residential Hospice Care supported Brian in his quest for a spiritual death according to what we all knew. I am a student of Thrangu Rinpoche and had made a poster presentation on “Death in Tibetan Buddhism” for the nursing staff a few years ago. I brought that out for the staff and Brian’s family so they could understand what he needed at the time. He died with the chanting of the monks on a CD with a wonderful nurse at his side.



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**Elliott Postol, 59,
died in Amsterdam, March 27, 2007**

By Cameron Chesson

Elliott was a member of Maitreya Instituut Amsterdam. He took refuge with Lama Zopa Rinpoche and participated in guided meditations and Lam-Rim study courses at the Instituut. Elliott's message to all of his family of friends, clients, and acquaintances was, "Loving kindness, compassion, generosity, and humanity." He, too, often struggled to realize these aspirations in his daily life. His gifts, as a natural healer and teacher, were as special as his "dancing eyes" and tremendous personal energy, which he shared each day in service to others. His incarnation began in Brooklyn, NY on Sept. 14, 1947 as Seymour Elliott Postol and ended in Amsterdam in his home across from the Maitreya Amsterdam center. His body remained in his home until cremation on March 31. Elliott leaves behind a family of friends which crosses all ages, lifestyles, and geographical locations. Two of his many joyful wishes for us all were, "You do not have to rehearse to be yourself!" and "Dance, baby, dance." Thank you, Elliott, for your leadership, your dedication to action through service, and your big heart which leaves an everlasting impression on those who knew you. ☸

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