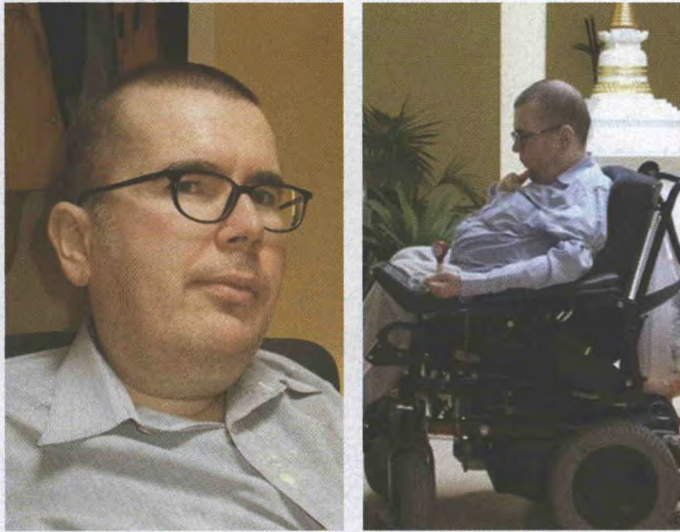


Obituaries

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



A Quality Life

Mathijs Schut, 45,
died in Amsterdam OLVG Hospital,
the Netherlands, April 20, 2007

By Greg Suffanti

Lama Zopa Rinpoche says we are fifty percent dependent upon sentient beings for our enlightenment. They are essential to reach the complete state of buddhahood, he says, which calls for half method and wisdom, and half the world we live in and learn from. That’s the deal. If we are fortunate, people like Mathijs cross our paths to teach and inspire us.

Mathijs was born with a severely deformed body and organs. His heart, the doctor said at the end, wedged near his neck, was near exploding from the strain of having pumped forty-five years and two days in a body that was predicted to survive no more than five years. That’s the body.

I first met Mathijs in September 2000 at Maitreya Instituut Amsterdam where I had recently begun a new life as an American expatriate-cum-Dharma student. Mathijs had been to America once, when his family traded homes with a family in New Haven, Connecticut. I had graduated from Yale in 1987, and we soon discovered initial common ground: our mutual, instant love for Ven. Kaye Miner and her wonderful anecdotes and clear, practical teaching of the

Dharma (I can only liken her presence and teaching style to Julie Andrews in a boardroom); and the fact that we lived close to one another. Mathijs lived in his own apartment, which was fitted to his needs. An intercom system was used for ‘round the clock assistance as needed. This form of ‘independent’ living was introduced in the Netherlands in the 1970s and was based on a care model used in Sweden.

Mathijs and I soon developed the pleasurable tradition of riding home together after class: me on my bike, Mathijs in his electric wheelchair. My own primitive accommodation, while cozy enough, represented my having renounced everything – and it was lacking a shower. It wasn’t long before we began a four-year tradition of my bathing at Mathijs’s house. I’d often prepare dinner for the two of us so that it was ready at 6:00 P.M. when Mathijs came home from work. I was still quite new in Holland and Mathijs always made me feel welcome.

He was a quiet man who easily laughed and took obvious delight in all his human encounters. After his death, I heard

from friends, family, colleagues, and acquaintances that each had experienced Mathijs essentially the same: as a beacon of hope and a source of inspiration. The words were practically the same whether in Dutch or in English: “He was so positive and if I ever faced anything that I thought I couldn’t do, I thought of Mathijs and found the courage.”

It wasn’t an easy life – ever. But I never once saw Mathijs angry or heard him complain. He never spoke ill of people, and it was often apparent from what he *didn’t* say how he felt about a particular situation or problem. He rose every morning at seven, sick or not, weekend or not, holiday or not, and began his disciplined days. When not working at his IT job, Mathijs’s days typically included reading and contemplation, various computer projects, like maintaining the website for Maitreya Instituut Netherlands, and a seemingly endless stream of projects that he’d concocted to make his life physically easier. These projects, from a tea-pouring system to a ‘hand tent’ with heating for riding outside in the cold, required the help of others. The participants’ list was long, as this always gave one the chance for a happy afternoon or evening with Mathijs. I learned that in reality Mathijs was only handicapped on the outside. He showed me, and I think others as well, how we were handicapped on the inside. He offered a way out through his warm, open heart. You couldn’t feel anything but good after spending time with Mathijs.

Even at the height of his physical prowess he could only just feed himself. He had never walked, and told me as a kid that he used to dream of running. In reality, he needed help simply to turn his head. He was far beyond his physical limitations and quickly put people at ease with his gentle, good nature and precise instructions on how to help him at any given moment with what he referred to as his “raar lichaam” or strange body.

Even towards the end, with his body failing, blown up like a fleshy ball, eyes swollen shut, unable to talk because of his tracheotomy, there was never a complaint. Nor was there a tear. It would have been easy to think the saddest tale of this man had you walked past him in intensive care, but there was in fact no sadness to be found. One day, standing at his bedside in intensive care, the attending nurse asked me, as if already knowing the answer: “Woon’t hij dan in z’on t’huis” (“Is he living in an institution”)? In my best Dutch, (thank you, Mathijs), I explained that:

Mathijs had worked fifteen years, most of them full-time, giving corporate IT support for a large American firm. He had studied Buddhism for ten years (including the Home Study Program, weekends in Emst with Geshe Sonam Gyeltsen, and three courses with His Holiness the

Dalai Lama). He was webmaster for Maitreya Nederland. He had two radio programs with his brother Bart for twelve years (including one in Frankfurt, in German!). He loved “uitstappen” or going out, to the theatre, restaurants, and the movies. We saw more than forty films together. (Oh yeah, and he spoke five languages!)

The only time I ever really saw Mathijs discouraged was when the airport broke his electric chair – his lifeline. He and good friend and travelling companion, Urte Goebel, were on their way to Copenhagen to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This was Mathijs’s worst nightmare and it happened. They left the next morning, Mathijs in an ordinary wheelchair, not fitted to his body, and Urte, ready and motivated to tackle this enormous challenge. They made it. This was Mathijs, and this effect of “can-do” he had on all who met him.

Mathijs never once dressed himself, stood up, or spoke above a loud whisper. He never had a girlfriend, cooked for himself, or turned himself over in bed. He was constantly helping others with their problems or financially supporting various causes. He told me last year it was his dream to, one day, teach the Dharma. Everyone trusted Mathijs and all sought his advice. Noble Mathijs. Noble Bodhichitta.

Lama Yeshe, whom I never met, has had a somewhat miraculous way of finding me when I absolutely need help the most. Lama’s “Last Letter” (*Mandala* April-May 2007) is no exception. If there is ever a time to make you realize how human and *not* realized you are, it’s when someone you love is dying. Lama Yeshe writes, “You need a happy mind, a conscientious mind, an open mind.” I had read Lama’s verse to Mathijs a couple of days before he made the transition. He understood the instructions.

Shortly before Mathijs died I said goodbye, and asked him if he was “at ease, happy, and open.” He squeezed my hand three times to let me know this was so. Ven. Kaye, just back from a three-month retreat, entered the room and announced, “Mathijs, it looks like it’s time for a new body!” I know Mathijs had to laugh at this. We had teased him so many times that in his next life he was going to be so beautiful. I took a quick glance at his eyes: they were clear and radiant.

I sat outside Mathijs’s room in his chair and prayed while the machines were turned off. Mathijs’s brother Bart held one hand, Ven. Kaye the other, as she recited, “The King of Prayers.” It happened quickly, peacefully, and beautifully. Mathijs died exactly as he had lived: open, conscientious, and happy. This is quality.

He is survived by his mother, Marja Wagenfeld, his brother Bart Schut, and his stepfather Peter Schumacher. ☉

Lee Tie-Shen,
Director of Hayagriva Center in Taiwan, 57,
died on May 20, 2007

By Shen Mei-Chen, Chairperson of FPMT Taiwan



Lee Tie-Shen (right) with Shen Mei-Chen and Ven. Woser Rinpoche.

Lee Tie-Shen, the late Director of Hayagriva Center in Taiwan, was the eldest son in his family. His father had a dozen pelagic [open-ocean] fishing boats and a textile factory. His mother died when he was twelve. At that time, the youngest sister was only three years old, and he took care of his siblings like their mother. Lee took over the family business at an early age, and his first job was that of the board chairperson. Later, he went into the construction business and eel commerce, and had investments in China.

Afterwards, Lee's business failed and he became unemployed. When the Hayagriva Center in Taiwan was set up in 2001, he came to help as a volunteer. Soon the center invited him to be the center's manager. This was only the second job he had had in his life. When he was the manager, he took over all the work at the center except for spiritual program coordinator, publicity, and accounting. He bore all the hardship without complaint, and often worked overtime. He was always cheerful with people and loved to joke. He was ready to help all the time, and was never calculating, not to mention never arguing with people. He was a great cook, and did his best to take care of the teachers and the sangha. He had a brotherly close relationship with the geshe and lamas, and was well-loved by teachers and students.

Many people came to the center because they liked him, and because of the warmth he brought to the center.

Although Lee didn't have much money, he was generous and often made donations. When the center had financial difficulties at one point, Lee volunteered to work without pay for several months. There were people who owed him money, but he never asked them to return it, for he believed that those people suffered more than him. Lama Zopa Rinpoche came to Taiwan in 2005, and suddenly said that it would be most beneficial for Lee to be the director of Hayagriva Center. Thus Lee began his directorship. One year later, he was found to have lung cancer, and was seriously ill. The centers and students all voluntarily made pujas for him locally and overseas. Although Lee had been offering service for the center for a long time, he was not totally convinced of the Three Jewels and afterlife. Rinpoche kept doing pujas and dedications for him, and sent blessed holy objects from abroad despite his busy schedule. Lee was very moved, and began reciting the Medicine Buddha mantra, and put Rinpoche's photo where he could see it.

When Lama Zopa came to Taiwan this year, Lee's condition worsened and he was hospitalized. His consciousness wasn't clear and he could not speak. Yet every time he was told that Rinpoche loved him and continued to do pujas and dedications for him, he would cry. Rinpoche also visited him at the hospital, and recited mantras for him. Rinpoche told him to rest assured, and take refuge in the Three Jewels, visualize Rinpoche as the Medicine Buddha, and aspire to be reborn into Amitabha's pure land. Rinpoche also blessed a sarira relic for Lee to take upon his death.

On the night of May 20, 2007, Lee passed away amid chants of the name of Sikhi Buddha and Medicine Buddha mantra by Ven. Choying Sangmo and several other sangha members and friends. They continued to chant Medicine Buddha mantra for eight hours by his side. His complexion became better than when he was alive, with the corners of his mouth curved upward, smiling. After he passed away, the center held seven weekly prayer services for him. Rinpoche has done pujas and dedications for him, and instructed us to build small stupas and tsa tsas for him. FPMT also requested His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the sangha at Sera Je Monastery and Kopan Monastery to make dedications for him. We hope that our late director, Lee Tie-Shen, can be reborn in a pure land where he can attain buddhahood speedily, and benefit countless sentient beings. ☸

Lyndall Rowan, 41,
died in her sleep in
Nelson, New Zealand on June 2, 2007

By Phillipa Rutherford



Lyndall was one of those people who was always smiling, larger than life, bright and cheerful and with a positive encouraging word for everyone she met.

Lyndall was the loving mother of three children and had a very supportive husband, Boaz from Israel. She was a midwife and spent all her working life caring for mothers and babies, selflessly giving of her time and energy.

It was shocking to all her friends and family that she passed away so suddenly – she was expected to attend a birth quite early in the morning and had not woken up. Boaz went to wake her, only to find her dead in bed: No medical reason was found.

Lyndall was always one for directness; this was certainly a direct lesson in impermanence, which jolted us all out of our complacency.

The funeral, which was more of a celebration of her life, was held at Chandrakirti Meditation Centre, with 300 people attending. The event was full of singing, dancing, prayers and tears – such was Lyndall's life. Members of her family spoke about how Lyndall had found spiritual peace and contentment in her last year, being more relaxed and sure of herself.

It was in the last year that Lyndall became a more regular visitor to Chandrakirti Centre after taking the Mitrugpa Initiation with Lama Zopa Rinpoche in July 2006.

She would come for one- to two-day solo retreats, attend classes and pujas, and help out with offerings. She was passionate about Tara, and spread Tara energy everywhere she went, constantly reciting the Tara mantra and selflessly serving others in whatever capacity the situation called for.

The day of her farewell celebration dawned full of rainbows and rain showers with no clouds. It turned into a glorious, sunny winter's day – everyone who attended had a wonderful experience in the bright and cheerful Meditation Hall.

Lyndall had just returned from a few weeks' holiday with her daughter in Nepal, where she stayed at Boudanath Stupa, getting up each morning at 4:30 A.M. to circumambulate the stupa with the monks. She visited Kopan, trekked in the Himalayas, did some personal retreat, and wrote home about how fulfilled she felt.

Lyndall was a magical person, always some intrigue and exciting stuff mixed in with all the love that flowed. We will miss her, but we cannot overlook the powerful teaching that Lyndall has given us. At Chandrakirti Centre we performed the Medicine Buddha puja for seven days, and recited the King of Prayers. The King of Prayers was also recited by all who attended the funeral.

Some words Lyndall wrote to a friend a month before her passing ...

"May you continue to blossom and grow and send out all your good fruit into the world.

We are so blessed!

Keep sending out your love and light into the world.

And always find time to nurture your soul.

Wishing you deep peace, joy and love.

May all beings be well.

Om Tare Tutare Ture Soha

Richest Goddess blessings to you!" ❁