

# 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](http://www.fpmt.org/shop)



Kim Hollingshead, 57, died suddenly, April 29, 2008 in Portland, Oregon  
*A family perspective by Randy Hollingshead and Margie Ginotti*

Sometimes it takes time to find one's paths of action and being. And those previous paths that one tried all contribute skills, challenges and confirmation

that this path is yours. For Kim, Buddhism was (and still is, we think) his path – bringing action and being together.

As an adult, Kim explored a number of careers – landscape architect, real estate agent, hospice caregiver, personal chef to wealthy families, bakery bun entrepreneur (the name of his product was Cinnful Buns), project manager, office manager and executive director. In all his work, caring service was his hallmark. It was significant to his family that his past four employers sent condolences, and three attended his services after his death.

Working at FPMT [as Director Administration] allowed him to use many of his skills as he coordinated the move from Taos to Portland and spent many hours ensuring that the new building was engineered and made suitable for the organization. Once in the new building, one of his goals was to make the office environment pleasant for staff and the outside of the building attractive to those passing by. A local who attended Kim's service in Portland told his family that he was very impressed that a manager in FPMT could be seen on weekends planting and gardening around the front of the building and sweeping the sidewalks.

Finding his path of being was more of a challenge for Kim. This path started during the Korean war when he was born in the Midwest town of Peoria, Illinois. He was the youngest in a family of four. His father was a veterinarian and his mother was the office manager who also did United Way work and was a Republican precinct committee woman. While he was sociable in school, his family lived in a country-suburban area with few children his age around. He grew up with only one close friend.

Three factors provided Kim with personal challenges in finding his path of being. First, he knew from the age of eight that he was gay – they did not use that term back then. So his social presence in high school was as a nice handsome young man, who took female classmates to all the school dances. Secondly, his mother became alcoholic after an automobile accident when he was in third grade. Finally, his father, a caring man, needed to work very long hours and could use inappropriate corporal punishment based on his own upbringing when he became angry.

In his early twenties, Kim came out as gay. Soon, he also became alcoholic. After about seven years of alcoholism, he became sober and had over twenty years of sobriety when he died. Buddhism was helping him to deal with anger.

One way he said Buddhism helped him was looking back on his alcoholism and learning to see it as a blessing. In the early 1980s, he felt that he might have engaged in risky behaviors had he not been wrestling with such severe alcoholism. In the years to come, when he provided hospice care for some of his friends who were dying of AIDS, he reflected that he could easily have been in the same position.

His family remembers his qualities of modesty, intelligence, creativity, logical thinking, curiosity, trustworthiness, caring, and sharp dress sense. He could turn an ordinary meal into an elegant affair, then discuss his interest in



Buddhism and quantum physics. Music was important to him as he learned to play the piano, organ and the tuba in high school. He swam competitively from the age of eight into high school where he lettered in swimming. He also learned how to fly a single engine plane while in college.

Oh, and of course his sense of humor. He did not tell jokes as much as make straight-faced funny comments about a situation. And he loved spoonerisms. His favorite, since he was an excellent cherry pie baker, was to say that he had just baked a “perry chie”.

We would like to express the family’s appreciation of the quick response of FPMT staff involvement, prayers initiated immediately at the hospital where he was taken following his death, the world-wide request for prayers, and the assistance the family received in guiding us in honoring the Buddhist rituals surrounding his death.

EDITOR’S NOTE: When Kim dropped to the ground outside FPMT’s international office (his sudden death was related to a cardiac event) he appeared to do so in a posture of complete surrender and letting go. There appeared to be no struggle, no holding on, and no pain. He had the Sutra of Golden Light in his pocket and seemed to have held a virtuous mind. Lama Zopa Rinpoche has said that Kim will go to a pure land.



Tom Flynn with His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Thomas E. Flynn, 60, died May 20, 2008 in Dublin, Ireland, of heart failure

By Ven. Sarah Thresher

Tom Flynn was quite simply a genius in his own way. Irish, with a Jesuit training and a highly successful business background as well as a yearning for the truly

spiritual, when Tom met Buddhism during a course at Land of Medicine Buddha (LMB), he was ripe for a new challenge. And that is what he got; with less than a year till the visit of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to the Bay Area,

Tom was asked to take over a debt-ridden organizing committee for the event and simultaneously transform Land of Medicine Buddha from an antiquated motel in the redwoods to a modern commercially viable spiritual healing retreat center.

So that is what he did. Under his directorship [2000-2002] everything changed. As one student describes it, “Each week you came to the center you never knew what to expect. Things were changing so fast.” All the guestrooms were renovated and upgraded, the gompas, the pine room, the lama’s house, the office, the swimming pool, the sauna, the meadow, the car park, the landscaping – the list is endless. Nothing was too daunting or too expensive; somehow Tom had the genius and the courage to take risks and to follow through his vision to make the place the best it could be *immediately!*

I will never forget how he decided to spend no money on advertising His Holiness’ visit in the spring of 2001, and yet still the news spread like wildfire. Phones rang day and night with people in Silicon Valley desperately wanting tickets: “We heard the Dalai something is coming and we just got to go...!” A few months before the visit, the hall that would fit three thousand was already booked out and the only viable alternative for upgrade was to book the million-dollar Mountain View stadium in the heart of Silicon Valley where the big name concerts were held. With little money in the bank and a huge deposit to pay and even huger risks, in Tom’s mind there was no trace of a doubt that we must go ahead. And that’s what happened. The risk paid off, twenty thousand people got to see His Holiness and by the end of the event nearly half a million surplus dollars were donated to different Buddhist causes. Tom even paid to have two Tibetan flags hung on the flagpoles towering above Mountain View for a year as a tribute to the symbol of Tibet; and to prepare a huge painting of the Potala as backdrop for His Holiness’ teaching. As Lama Zopa Rinpoche commented, “Many people might have the idea, but very few could actually do it!”

On the spiritual side, Tom’s time at LMB was like a roll call of teachings by the highest lamas: Ribur Rinpoche gave weekends of teachings on Pabongka Rinpoche’s Lam Rim in the most seductively experiential way that drew many new



people to the Dharma; Lama Zopa Rinpoche led the Great Medicine Buddha Retreat; and Choden Rinpoche began the ongoing and painstakingly brilliant commentary to Lama Tsong Khapa's Great Lam Rim. The Eight Medicine Buddha statues were commissioned from India, gold-leafed, adorned and set on a custom handcrafted shrine with an array of extensive and beautiful offerings. A huge new prayer wheel was constructed. The Memorial shrine murals were completed, and new statues appeared in the meadow, the entrance ways and the landscaped gardens. It was even Tom's plan to construct a special tent in the car park so that a large replica of the 500ft Maitreya statue could dominate the vision of all those who entered the land – Tom deeply appreciated Lama Yeshe's vision to construct the largest statue in the world.

Those were whirlwind days, Tom's directorship at LMB, and they have left an indelible mark on the center and the face of FPMT in the Bay Area. Thousands of people have benefited from the upgraded LMB, thousands more made connection with His Holiness during that momentous visit to Mountain View. Tom passed away peacefully in his native country surrounded by the family he adored on the seventh anniversary of the third day of that historic visit. The effects of his courage and his deep commitment to what is truly spiritual in this world and the fearlessness of his vision live on.

Henk Sinnema, 55, died May 22, 2008 at home in Narracan, Australia, from cancer

By Helen Sinnema

**B**orn in Friesland in Holland, Henk migrated with his family to Australia when he was eight years old. His father died of lung cancer during Henk's final year of high school. This was a huge blow to him and he searched for meaning to life during his twenties.

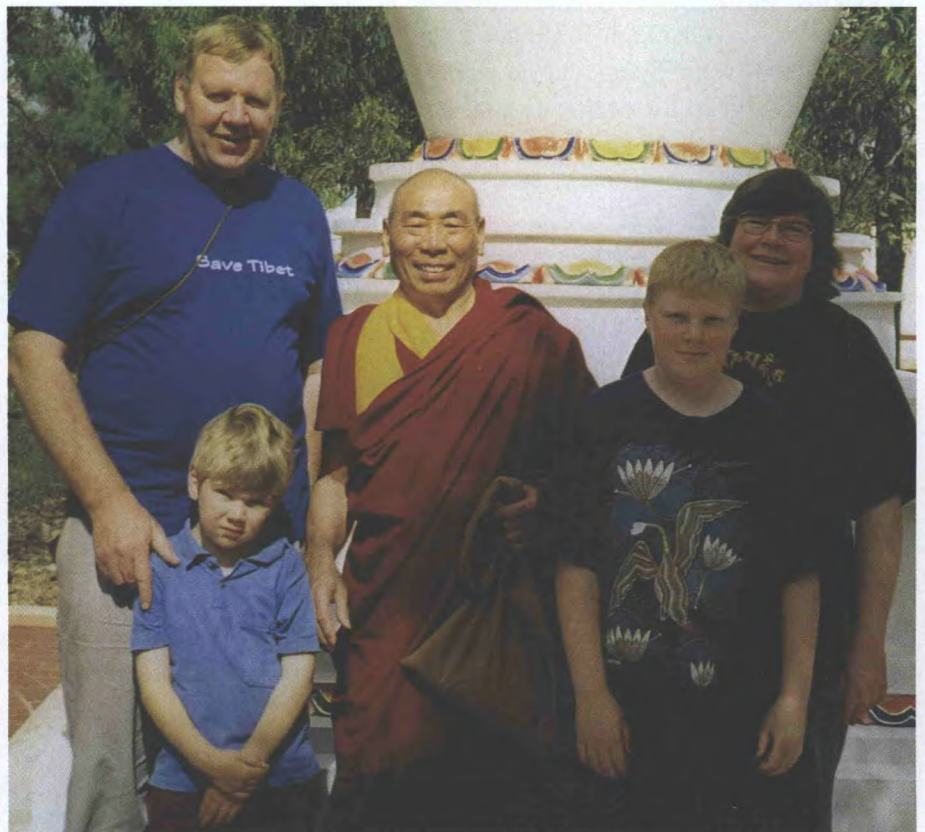
I first met Henk when he was thirty at a Reichian Therapy weekend run by Lew Luton. We started going out together when Henk was thirty-four and I was

thirty-three. Henk seemed to be a generous, philosophical, laid back kind of guy.

One of the first things he told me about himself was that he had met this man, a monk or a lama – someone who had “just looked at him...”. This had changed his life. I had no idea what he was talking about, because the only sort of personage from an Eastern religion I could imagine was someone like the Maharishi or the Bhagawan Sri Rajnesh – very unappealing even in the 1980s!

The man whom Henk met was Lama Thubten Yeshe, and at the age of twenty-two Henk had been to the inaugural 1974 course given by Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa at Diamond Valley where Chenrezig Institute was later founded. Henk stayed at the retreat for only ten days; he grew tired of the teachings being given by a young Lama Zopa, and so he used to hang around outside the tent. Lama Yeshe took the trouble to approach Henk one day although, as far as Henk could see, Lama Yeshe never spoke to anyone (he was in retreat). Henk described a kind of mutuality developing between them, which became a transformational experience.

From left, Henk, Julian, Geshe Doga, Marten and Helen





Henk said that Lama Yeshe appeared “like Saint Nicklaus” to him. Such a wordless personal experience defies description, but those who knew Lama Yeshe would understand it.

Henk was not the sort of person to boast or wax lyrical about anything, and it really took me twenty years to understand his experience with Lama Yeshe. In the early 1970s, Henk had set aside his study at Monash University to travel to Europe. He hitch-hiked across Australia to get to Asia, and then took the overland route to Europe. In India he had the lucky experience of getting off a train in the middle of the night with some traveling companions from a youth hostel. That place was Bodhgaya, and he had a very pleasant stay there.

In an email to Damien Busby at Tara Institute a couple of months before he died, Henk talked about some of his life at that time:

“After my Dad died, I read a book about the world’s religions. Dad had lost faith in what he had been taught – Dutch Reform Church is Calvinist! This got me interested in Buddhism, and Ian Coghlan was interested to talk about this also. We were at the same residences at Monash University in 1971; he was doing science and I was doing economics and politics.

“After I left the first Lam Rim course by Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa at Diamond Valley in Queensland, I journeyed back to Fraser Island where I’d stayed earlier with friends, and had sent a postcard to Ian to come up. When I got to Fraser Island we met up the next morning. I hadn’t expected to see him as it had been a couple of months since I wrote to him. Well, we had a good talk about the course, and this got him interested in attending one which he later did with Phra Khantipalo, an English Theravadin monk who also taught courses in Queensland, and who inspired Ian; you can see our beginnings are intertwined.”

Ian Coghlan (Jampa Yignyen) traveled to India and became an ordained monk studying for a Geshe degree at Sera Je in southern India. He would sometimes stay with Henk on his trips back to Australia.

In 1989, Henk and I married and had a son, Marten, and in 1994 another son, Julian, arrived. Henk was a patient and loving father to his boys, and we always took them to Tara Institute to hear teachings from Geshe Doga. Henk was a faithful member of Tara Institute for over twenty years, although we lived an hour-and-a-half’s drive away on a small farm in Narracan. On Geshe Doga’s advice we sponsored a

monk from House 15 at Sera Je, as well as later assisting with the purchase of the new House 15.

During one of His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s visits to Melbourne in the 1990s, Henk organized for his mother and for Jampa Yignyen’s parents to come up from Leongatha to hear the public talk. Henk worked hard looking after the farm whilst also working full-time at Loy Yang Power Station. Once, soon after Tara Institute moved to Brighton, Henk loaded up his farm ute and took a load of small boulders and rocks down for Tara Institute garden!

Henk was a most unassuming, kind and generous person. Many of his friends and family did not understand that he was a Buddhist. Henk had multiple myeloma (a cancer of the bone marrow) for two years before he died. As a researcher on a chemotherapy regimen kindly explained, Henk was on the “treatment treadmill”.

Henk died at home after collapsing from complications due to blood hyper-viscosity and the chemo he was taking. Hours after Henk died I found on the floor near where he had collapsed a red heart. It was a stress-ball and I guess it must have fallen from somewhere, but to me it was a sign of Henk’s bodhichitta and how love connects us all.

This brings me in conclusion to Geshe Doga and what an incomparable spiritual friend and teacher he was for us. Henk’s email to Damien at Tara Institute was actually in response to the news that Geshe Doga wanted to come and visit Henk. I feel that Geshe Doga’s prayers have been like a rescue vessel for Henk, Marten, Julian and me.

A couple of days before Henk’s funeral, Julian and I were driving on a road close to home when we had to stop the car: There was a beautiful peacock on the road. I think it was the symbol of Geshe Doga – the Bodhisattva gone out on the road to meet people.

We held a wonderful funeral in Moe for Henk and he was buried where he wanted – at Willow Grove Cemetery. Many people from Tara Institute drove up for the funeral as well as Ven. Tenzin Chonyi who came over from Sandy Point. In a basic inclusive Uniting Church ceremony at the funeral home, I read Shantideva’s dedication and recited the long Chenrezig mantra to an overflowing chapel of people. Ven. Chonyi stood beside the minister at the graveside and sang a dedication prayer. Henk’s life was so meaningful in the end. ●