

■ Your COMMUNITY

This section is aimed at introducing you to the many remarkable individuals in the organization through profiles, interviews, personal stories and obituaries.

PROFILE

Youth in Refuge

*The 2010 Light of the Path retreat was attended by a very special young girl, **Maddy Stafford**, who, at the age of 10, requested to become a nun and geshema. **Merry Colony** spoke with Maddy and her mother, **Mer Stafford**, about Maddy's strong connection to Lama Zopa Rinpoche and the Dharma, and her future plans.*



Merry Colony: You are a bit of a phenomena here at the retreat, Maddy. Tell me about yourself, how and when you met the Dharma.

Maddy: I met the Dharma three years ago when I was seven. I went to see the Ganden Jangtse monks who were making a Chenrezig sand mandala in New Hampshire in a tiny museum. One of the monks (Lobsang Damchö) saw that I was really interested and invited me into the room where they were working. He gave me the implements that the sand comes out of and showed me how to do it. This meeting really made me think and it changed my mind. After that, I decided to become a vegetarian because I didn't want to kill animals. My Mom and Papa were already vegetarian.

Merry: Where do you live and do you go to a center already?

Maddy: I live in Freeport, Maine on a farm with 30 bats, three cats and chickens. I went to my first teaching at Kurukulla Center with Ani Yeshe. It was an introduction to Buddhism class. It made a lot of sense to me. I then started going to weekly classes there. I go to Geshe Tsulga's lam-rim teachings on Sunday and Geshe Tenley's classes on Wednesdays.

Merry: When did you meet Lama Zopa Rinpoche?

Maddy: I met Rinpoche at Milarepa Center just two weeks ago! I took Refuge with him and 12 other people. The first thing I said to Lama Zopa is that I want to be a geshema and he told me to memorize the *100,000 Verse Prajñāparamita* in Tibetan [a total of 12 volumes].

Merry: I see you at every session, even those very early and very late ones that others don't make it to!

Maddy: I have gone to all the night sessions with Lama Zopa, but I sometimes miss the morning session [starting as early as 5 A.M.]. The emptiness teachings make sense to me but some other things don't.

Merry: Has Lama Zopa given you any advice?

Maddy: I asked if I could become a nun and he told me it would be good in three years to get ordained at Land of Medicine Buddha with Choden Rinpoche.

Merry: What does mom think about that?

Mer (Maddy's mother): The idea of leaving her family didn't disturb Maddy. Lama Zopa Rinpoche is the first person to take Maddy seriously. She has been very unhappy until now to not have that connection. Maddy has felt so happy since being here. She looked at me and said, "Lama Zopa loves me." Rinpoche told me that Maddy "will enlighten many beings at a young age" and gave Maddy a thangka of Lama Tsongkhapa and his two disciples.

Maddy: He gave me the name Thubten Labdron and asked me to do Lama Tsongkhapa guru yoga daily. I've memorized the refuge and bodhichitta prayer, the *Heart Sutra*, *Praises to the 21 Taras* in English and the mandala offering. These haven't been too difficult, but it is not so easy for me to memorize school work! I like the Tara praises in Tibetan.

Mer: She was previously in a Waldorf school, but kept asking to be homeschooled. She is also studying Tibetan with Geshe Tenley at Kurukulla Center. Many people have said how inspiring it was for them to have Maddy there in the gompa and staying up through the late night sessions.

Also, a lot of parents came up to me and asked if they should bring their kids to a retreat like this. The thing I really want to tell parents is that one major factor for why my kids are spiritual and calm is because we have taken media out of their life completely. So they have no TV and no computer games. Science has proven that this damages the neural pathways, making it hard to develop concentration.

Maddy: Kids have to want to come to an event like this, and not because their parents are coming! ♦