

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 are available from the Foundation Store, www.fpmt.org/shop.

THUBTEN NUDRUP, 45, passed from this life in February, 2006, in Queens, New York.

Thubten Nudrup will be remembered, above all, as a “Kopan monk.” The first group of young monks to pop-



ulate the newly-formed Kopan Monastery in Nepal in the mid-seventies were Sherpas, like Lama Zopa Rinpoche, brought from Lawudo. Thubten Nudrup was among them.

Thubten Nudrup worked at various jobs around Kopan, always following the Buddhist monks’ basic studies, but also always ready to help, assisting in the kitchen and making sure the younger monks had washed their faces and were following the discipline. In June 1977, a notable event took place at Kopan that all affectionately agree is thanks to Thubten Nudrup.

The renowned scholar Geshe Lhundrup Sopa had come to Kopan to teach. After his arrival, he issued an unusual order for everyone at Kopan to attend the upcoming puja. The young

Thubten Nudrup, however, was occupied with his fascination for a certain apparatus that had been set up on the grounds of Kopan by a Dutch student. The monastery was unable to afford wood as fuel for the kitchen, so the student had rigged up a container behind the monks’ quarters to house excrement produced by monastery residents. In six months’ time, the student estimated that the human waste would “mature” and release methane gas, which could then be routed into the kitchen via pipes buried in the ground. By the time Geshe Sopa arrived, five and a half months had passed and Thubten Nudrup, instead of going immediately to the puja, decided to check on the experiment. While everyone else headed to the gompa, he headed to the waste container, opened the hatch, and threw in a match. The entire container exploded, spreading feces far and wide across Kopan.

Lama Yeshe asked him to work at “Yak & Yeti,” the trading and exporting company in Kathmandu that was started by Marcel Bertels (then Ven. Marcel) to support the Eastern and Western Sangha. He worked there as a layperson for the next twenty-three years.

In 1999, Nudrup was granted a U.S. “green card” and moved to New York. A small community of ex-Kopan monks lived in Queens and they took in their Kopan brother. Less than a year after his arrival, Nudrup learned that he had

stomach cancer. The community rallied around him and raised the money for an operation and chemotherapy.

In 2005, his cancer came back. He was hospitalized for six months, passing away in his hospital bed on the auspicious eve of Losar in February 2006. His hospital stay was a difficult one, though he never complained. When his friends learned that he wasn’t getting enough food because none of the nurses were helping to feed him, they made frequent visits to the hospital to look after him. He was entirely unafraid of dying and seemed concerned only for the time and effort his friends and the nurses were putting into his care. Never one to mention his pain, he instead constantly affirmed his happiness. “I know what to do, I’m happy,” he said.

The life of Thubten Nudrup is a testament to the fact that even the humblest among us can be bodhisattvas. He will be remembered fondly by many who came across his path in the early days of Kopan, particularly as a “brother monk,” a member of the Kopan family that took care of him throughout his life, and in whom he placed unfailing love and trust.

MARGARET (ELLEN) CASTLES, 54, passed from this life on July 28, 2006, in Port Kembla, NSW, Australia.

Margaret, who attended the third Kopan course in the 1970s, lived in



India for five years. At Lama Yeshe's request, she worked for Anila Yeshe Dolma (Sister Max Matthews known affectionately as "Mommy" Max) in the clothing business.

She undertook several retreats and took teachings from many lamas including His Holiness the Dalai Lama and His Holiness Ling Rinpoche. Gehlek Rimpoche, Lama Yeshe, and Lama Zopa Rinpoche were her main teachers.

Back in Sydney, she became involved with Vajrayana Institute where she served as director from 1988 to 1990. She led retreats, taught, advised, listened, and organized events, among them tours for His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 1992 and the Panchen Lama.

Margaret did her practices – got angry (she'd be the first to admit it) – thought, helped others – got angry – listened to teachings, didn't give up, and always inspired others. Sometimes she made others angry – but she had such practical faith: She listened to her teachers and would not give up. She later became an FPMT regional coordinator – and got angry! But she kept going.

Thirteen years ago, she developed a life-threatening illness and under instruction began a weekly self-initiation practice which she kept up until her death.

A year ago, she was diagnosed with skin cancer. Despite numerous pujas and prayers and her struggle to find a cure, she succumbed peacefully on July 28 in the hospital.

For most of the time, Margaret could not believe that she was dying so young. "What about all the practices I've done," she would say. "Don't they count for anything?"

She spent three weeks in the hospital doing her "death retreat," assisted to the end by Geshe Dawa, who showed outstanding, unequivocal compassion, understanding, and insight. He cared for her so beautifully, and on one occasion stayed throughout the night, praying.

Her strength and tenacity were characterized by this: Two weeks before her death, Lama Zopa Rinpoche rang her. Despite being affected by medication, she sat on the side of her bed and made a general confession to Rinpoche.

Margaret's breathing stopped and various teachers were informed. Those around her did the suggested prayers for three and a half hours. The mood in the room changed from the pain and sadness of losing a loved one to happy, joyous, and relaxed. Her face actually changed appearance, becoming more and more beautiful. "We followed Lama Zopa Rinpoche's advice from the 'Death and Dying' handbook," said her partner, Eric Kaljot.

Margaret spoke to Gehlek Rimpoche about two weeks before her death. He repeated to her, "Buddha, Dharma, Sangha will never let you down."

Margaret is survived by Eric, and her brothers and sisters, Thomas, Gloria, Jo, Francis, and Malcolm.

HELGA FASOLD, 88, passed from this life on July 21, 2006, in Germany.

Helga is survived by her daughter Renate Ogilvie, a Sydney, Australia psychotherapist and Dharma teacher. After a long illness, she recently passed away peacefully in Germany in the arms of her son. As an admirer of Lao Tzu, she found Buddhism "a bit too organized." But after meeting Lama Zopa Rinpoche she "couldn't sleep all night," and daily recited the special mantra he gave her. On her many visits to Australia and Vajrayana Institute, she made a strong connection with Geshe Dawa and Venerable Pende Hawter whom she quizzed on karma and emptiness. A violinist and war-time nurse, she inspired many people. Her ashes will go into a stupa at the Garden of Enlightenment at Chenrezig Institute, under a tree planted by Geshe Dawa. ☸



Helga Fasold with Ven. Pende Hawter