

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



Johannes Ulrich Minder, 57, died in Queensland, Australia on August 10, 2008, of heart failure

By Ven. Tenzin Namdag

Johannes was born in Berne, Switzerland in 1951. He later studied food technology and food science, as well as food presentation.

In 1974 he married his wife Ursula (pictured with him above). Together

they moved to Basel, Switzerland, where he worked as a food designer for various companies throughout Europe and developed new varieties of popular products, such as yoghurt and ice-cream. He also assisted with developing Red Bull, an energy drink

In 1992 Johannes and Ursula immigrated to Australia and lived in Maleny in southern Queensland. They travelled a lot within the country and later set up and ran the Currimundi Lake Restaurant in Caloundra.

In 2003 Johannes moved to Ravenshoe where he later met Ann and Franc Gallo from Atherton and assisted them with the set-up of a cheese and chocolate factory and a restaurant. He worked overseeing the cheese and chocolate production until he died. He did a lot of marketing, and the cheeses are now being sold in supermarkets here in Queensland. He died without revealing the secrets to his recipes, so no one knows what they were.

Johannes joined the Dewachen Study Group soon after moving to Ravenshoe and attended teachings whenever Ven. Namdag visited to teach in Cairns. He was a devoted student with a wonderful grasp of the Dharma teachings. He always contributed in a very meaningful way to discussion, and was ready to share how he had put the

teachings into practice and how they were helping him. He never failed to turn up to classes with newcomers in tow, and so he was instrumental in exposing many to the Dharma.

He will be missed very much by his Dharma brothers and sisters – not only for his wonderful contribution to the group but also for the beautiful cheese and chocolates that he brought for us to share when we had weekend teachings!

Johannes was a passionate pilot and owned a small aircraft in Switzerland. He loved doing aerobatics. And in Australia he liked hang gliding. He loved being in the limitless sky! He was not scared of taking risks, never scared of dying! He said he was ready for death whenever it may come. He died at his home at Ravenshoe on his beloved property. No one was with him at the time.

He lived his life to the fullest, never put a foot on the brake, and so he often got caught speeding ... ending up on a “good behaviour licence”!

We have lost a wonderful friend with an open heart, always ready to offer help where needed, always able to see the positive in everything and everyone, thinking always of others and how he could help them to be happy.

He would not want us to be sad ... yet we are. He is survived by his wife Ursula.



Jack Morison, 53, died August 13, 2008, from cancer

Contributed by Dean Alper, Ven. Paula Chichester and Lisë Funkhouser Paul

Jack was one of the world's pioneering white-water rafting guides and a devout student of the Dharma. "Riverman Jack" is fondly remembered as an active member of Vajrapani


Institute and a participant in the first Enlightened Experience Celebration in India organized by Lama Yeshe and his students.

Jack's introduction to Buddhism appeared to be somewhat serendipitous. In the fall of 1980 Jack took part in an expedition on the Indus River in Pakistan. Jack planned to meet his lifelong friend Dean Alper in October to trek in the Everest region. Jack was delayed, and by the time he got to Nepal the November course was already underway. Jack walked up the Kopan hill to say hello to Dean before returning home to California. Once there, Jack decided to listen in.


What he heard moved him. By the end of the day he cancelled his trip home and moved in for the duration of the course. Then and there Jack began a spiritual quest that was to remain at the heart of his experience for the rest of his life.

During the following several years Jack continued to guide rivers worldwide. He made numerous first descents on rivers in India, South America and Africa. In the offseason he devoted himself to study and meditation retreats. A devout student of Lama Yeshe, Jack completed many courses and retreat, including two Vajrasattva retreats at Milarepa Center in Vermont during the dead of winter. Jack later said that he'd found his greatest contentment during those long retreats in Milarepa's drafty farmhouse.

In the late 1980s he founded White Magic Unlimited, and began offering trips around the world. Jack got the business up and running and established an office in Kathmandu. White Magic grew steadily but Jack found himself working all hours, wearing all hats to compete with better-known, better-funded operations. It was a daunting challenge, but Jack made it work.



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The irony was that the busier White Magic got, the less Jack could enjoy the freedom to roam – the heart of the explorer's life. Jack married and became a father of the greatest loves of his life, his two sons, Walker and Griffin. Still, Jack continued his inner work and he was never more actively engaged in Dharma practice than he was during the last year of his life.

In February 2008, Jack learned he had cancer. Jack interpreted his diagnosis as his ultimate challenge to actualize his human potential. He decided to marshal all available forces to protect his physical health, but he also chose to make the experience a conscious unfolding for himself and those around him. He vowed to make the process a mindful journey that he would affirmatively share with his friends and his two teenage boys. Jack studied, reflected and meditated and began gently letting go of desires, goals, aspirations and outcomes.

As he had done throughout his life, Jack turned his attention to comforting and helping others. When friends came to visit him at home – and scores of friends visited – Jack concentrated his diminishing energies on reaching out to reassure and to teach. For those who expressed an interest, Jack would speak about impermanence and explain emptiness. To everyone without exception, Jack would say with a twinkle in his eye: “How are *you*? I’m concerned about you.” Those who came to Jack’s bedside with fear and apprehension found themselves leaving uplifted and inspired by his grace, wisdom and compassion.

Jack Morison died peacefully at his home in Mill Valley, California. His kindness to us in his teaching on impermanence and how to die a good death goes deeper. As a student of Kyabje Zong Rinpoche and others, and

practitioner of the Chakrasamvara Tantra, Jack showed us the living power of our lineage. It says in the tantra that, at the time of death, Vajrayogini will come to help the yogi. And she did. Lisë Paul came to Jack’s aid in the last six months of his life. She cared for him in perfect love. The day before his passing, his old friends from the early Dharma days in Dharamsala appeared to assist Jack with his final self-initiation to purify his tantric vows and help him on his way to Chakrasamvara’s pure land. Even though Jack had been a busy lay person with a family, even though every organ in his body had cancer, his mind was as clear as a bell and his samaya was evident and powerful right up to the time of his passing. Truly an inspiration to us all. Thank you, Jack.

Ed Softky, 44, died October 9, 2008, in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA, hit-and-run car accident.

By Ven. Sue Macy (*Tsunma-la*)

I never knew anyone like Ed. Always, always, he was doing things for others, he just always thought about

others. He would shovel old people’s sidewalks and they did not know who did it, it didn’t matter. He always just did things for others. Automatically.” – Geshe Ngawang Singey

My dear friend Ed Softky died as he lived his life, providing service to others. At 8:30 A.M. on Oct. 9, while taking groceries from his car for a hospice meeting, Ed was fatally injured in a hit-and-run accident. It was a quiet, tree lined street. The driver was under the influence of drugs and alcohol. Ed was pronounced dead at 9:00 A.M.

Ed’s interest in Buddhism began during his college years in the early 1980s. By 2002, he had the strong aspiration to become a translator, and began private study with Geshe Tsulga at Kurukulla Center.

“Ed was a very dedicated student,” Geshe-la says. “He had a good heart and a good motivation. He wanted to help spread the Dharma in the West. He thought he could be of benefit as a translator. And it made him happy.”

During Ed’s second visit to Sera Monastery in 2002, Geshe-la arranged for private tutors. Ed got lots of extra



Ed Softky with Geshe Ngawang Singey

practice conversing with Geshe-la's monks, who gave him the name "Ed-la".

While at Sera, Ed met Geshe Ngawang Singey. When Geshe Ngawang established his center, Thosum Gephelling Institute in Williamsville, Vermont, Ed was his translator.

Ven. Jampa Tenzin perfectly summarized what so many people said about Ed. "Ed was a nice guy who tried to be the best brother, son, uncle and friend he could," says Ven. Jampa. "His unexpected death is a lesson that this precious life is short and we should make the most of it by being kind to all. This is what hooked Ed on Buddhism and what he strove for in all his words, actions and thoughts. Ed touched the lives of many not because he was a saint, but because he was everyman, with the same struggles, imperfections and neuroses as us. He did everything in his power to transform them, and his positive progress was an inspiration."

Ven. Jampa continues: "My friendship and working relationship with Ed strengthened when I sponsored Geshe Ngawang Singey's arrival from Sera Je over five years ago. Ed was overjoyed to accompany him to the U.S., and chomping at the bit to translate for him. They became wonderful friends, and were regularly seen hammering out translations at every teaching. Geshe Ngawang loves to tell the story when teacher and translator were at an impasse for lack of the right wording. While everyone looked on, Geshe Ngawang ended the Tibetan exchange in English by telling Ed with a smile, 'Oh never mind, tell them what you want to say, that's what you usually do.' Geshe Ngawang joked that these were Ed's teachings. It's rare to see a lama cry tears of sorrow. On the day Ed died ... not so rare."

Chris Verschoor, 45, died in Nijmegen, The Netherlands, on October 20, 2008, from cancer.

By Andy Weber

Chris was a former volunteer and student of Maitreya Instituut. He was also one of my oldest students – our relationship goes back to 1984, my second art course at Maitreya Instituut in Holland.

He was one of the bravest men I have come across in my life. Even then he was confined to a wheelchair with muscular dystrophy, and over the years coped with his deteriorating illness remarkably well.

His innovative spirit – painting deities with an airbrush in the '80s and '90s and then later when he could hardly move his arms going onto the Mac brush – created many wonderful images. These images are still with us today, on Tibetan incense boxes, book covers or in the form of original



Chris and his artwork for a set of incense sticks

paintings. Unknown to most, we worked together on a logo for one of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's charities after he won the Nobel Peace Prize. That was just one of the many contributions Chris left behind. He also helped Maitreya Instituut students tremendously in painting the wealth vases.

Thank you, my friend and fellow artist Chris. I hope you enjoyed your time with us; we all thank you for sharing your kindred spirit and inspiration. ☸

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