

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

Amelia Marfagón, 68, died in Segovia, Spain, January 10, 2009, of a stroke

By Isabel Arocena

Amelia was born in Segovia. She studied to become a school teacher, then she became a nurse, and it was as a nurse that she worked all her life in Barcelona, Canary Islands, Segovia, and Switzerland. She loved her job, never losing the joy of her duties.



She liked to travel. Her holidays would introduce her to many different countries – meeting incredible people in places like Cambodia, beautiful bonsai forests in China, Patagonia, and then Nepal, where she met spiritual teachers.

O Sel Ling Retreat Center was always her destination for her free days; there she became a regular retreat, a friend, a sister, and a

benefactor, offering her service and material support.

She retired from her work as a nurse in 2006, and went immediately to the November Course at Kopan, then the Kalachakra Initiation in Amaravati, and back to Segovia, taking care of the family house and the vegetable garden, flowers and trees, friends, brother and sisters. But always, O Sel Ling was a place to come and help. She is sadly missed.

Vicki Eunice Arender, 56, died in Sydney, Australia, December 11, 2008, of cancer

By Ven. Thubten Chokyi

In the brief time I knew Vicki, she was an absolute inspiration with her enthusiasm for life, her strength of mind and her determination and insistence to serve others when she herself was in such excruciating pain, knowing she didn't have much longer to live.

This is indicative of how she lived her life. As Police Commander for the Sydney Inner West City precinct, she

was awarded the Australian Police Medal for distinguished service. She introduced beneficial measures for dealing with people with mental health problems, and whenever she saw a police colleague with potential, she quietly gave them opportunities to develop their skills, not taking credit. She was so delighted that, as Police Commander, she had a Shakyamuni Buddha statue placed permanently in the reception area of the Marrickville Police Station. As she contemplated the benefits for her colleagues working there, she said, “Everyone who goes in there will have to see it. They can't miss it.”

She had such a sharp and strong mind. When I saw her in the hospital she kept saying she wanted to manage her own painkillers so that she could stay alert for her meditation practice. When she was in too much pain to practice, she would play recordings of mantras and prayers so she could hear them, even while she was sleeping. When she was well enough to be at home, she would play mantras loudly in her house and yard for the benefit, she said, not just for her dog, but for all the animals in other yards, for her neighbors and for all kind sentient beings. She arranged to have mantras playing at her funeral, where Geshe Samten gave a tribute, leaving a wonderful imprint for all her former police colleagues, family members and friends.

When I first met Vicki, she immediately offered her services to Vajrayana Institute. Whenever I called she would come and help. She was a wonderful gentle team leader for our Happiness and Its Causes Conference last May – she was in charge of crowd management, despite all the difficulties she was having with medication and treatment. She had battled with cancer for seven years, and yet a lot of people at the center didn't know she was ill. And at the volunteer



Vicki with her beloved dog Luca who died on February 3 from cancer.

thank you party last June, she insisted on giving a personal gift to the volunteers, without taking credit.

Vicki studied the first modules of *Discovering Buddhism* at Vajrayana Institute until she went into the hospital. She continued to listen to the *DB at Home* materials and to all the recorded teachings of Ven. Robina Courtin. She was the first to volunteer to help organize Ven. Robina's teachings in July but, sadly, was too ill to attend.

She attended the prayer vigils for Tibet outside the Chinese Embassy in Sydney last March. As Police Commander she had led the security assessment of the inside of the embassy when it first opened, so she thought it poignant that now, here she was outside, barred from access. One night, she went over to chat to the police who were on duty. As their former boss, she would have been the one giving the orders. They asked, "What are you doing here?" She replied, "I'm on the other side now," and they enjoyed a few laughs. She felt for them, knowing that they had to stand for hours while we were sitting comfortably on our cushions reciting prayers by candlelight.

Vicki's interest in Buddhism ripened late in her life, but it was incredibly powerful. She embraced Buddhism wholeheartedly as she did everything in life. All of us at Vajrayana Institute miss her incredibly. May we meet again soon, very soon, and continue on the journey together.

Ama Dorli Schriever, aged 83, died in Küsnacht, Switzerland, November 27, 2008, of varicella zoster infection

By Martin Kalff

When Dorli Schriever, who was affectionately called "Ama Dorli" by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, left her body, I was told by her daughters that many people in different parts of the world prayed for her good rebirth. She was indeed loved by many who knew her as a generous and open mind.

Dorli Schriever was married to an architect and the mother of four children. She was one of the first people in Switzerland to dedicate herself wholeheartedly to the practice of Tibetan Buddhism. She was introduced to it by Geshe Rabten, then-abbot of Rikon Monastery. Later she also became a student of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

She lived in a beautiful old mansion with a romantic garden, populated by chicken and geese, near the shore of the Zurich Lake in Switzerland. Here she gave shelter for many years to the Tibetan refugee, Lama Tsenshab Rinpoche. In exchange he helped her with studies of Tibetan texts. This place, named Yuelo Koe (Tara's Buddha Land) by Geshe Rabten, became a welcoming pure land for many lamas to stay and teach.

I remember well the extraordinary initiation of the practice of Chöd by Kyabje Song Rinpoche, which was attended also by Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Geshe Jampa Lodro (who taught for many years at the Yiga Chözin Dharma Center in Zollikon). Another special event was an initiation given at Dorli's home by Gomo Tulku on the practice of Vajrayogini and Simhamukha. It was, I believe, one of the last teachings this great teacher gave before leaving his body.

For more than thirty years she participated in the activities and development of the Yiga Chözin Dharma Center in Zollikon, both as student and sponsor. My most vivid memories are of her engaged participation in our Dharma study group over a period of about twelve years. She was not satisfied with superficial answers, and for her the preparation for death was essential.

Dorli Schriever was also a gifted artist and she created beautiful clay and paint images of various buddhas. The figures she made are infused with life, sometimes carried out with a creative Western touch, such as a beautiful Naro Khachöma within a circle of fire and red roses.

In the later part of her life she became very much involved in the Dzogchen teachings. I was impressed how she attended a special Dzogchen retreat in Bhutan when she was in her 70s.

She passed away in a peaceful way after falling asleep. May the honest and lifelong search for truth and liberation of my dear friend Dorli Schriever come to full completion wherever she may be reborn.

Gela de los Ángeles, age 55, died in Morelia, Mexico, November 24, 2008, of liver disease.

By Edgardo Molina

Gela was the coordinator of FPMT's Khedrup Sangye Yeshe Study Group in the city of Morelia, Mexico. Ten years ago she had her first contact with Buddhist teachings in the Gelugpa tradition. Her desire to meet Lama Zopa Rinpoche arose just by seeing his picture on the cover of a book.



Dorli Schriever and her painting of White Tara



In a difficult moment of her life, almost on the verge of death, she found refuge in Lama Zopa Rinpoche by reading his book *The Door to Satisfaction*. But it was not until she saw a poster in April 2008 that she found that Rinpoche was going to be in Guadalajara, Mexico, leading a retreat. She didn't hesitate in approaching and receiving teachings directly from him. At that time, she was going through a critical physical and mental stage.



During that retreat she had the opportunity to have an interview with Lama Zopa Rinpoche. In the meeting, she requested permission to start a study group, pursuing her intention to maximize the time that she had for living while thinking of benefiting others based on her study and practice.

With her generosity, dedication and charisma, she worked hard to realize the advice of Rinpoche, leaving a solid foundation for the growth of the Study Group.

Ven. Lobsang Chodron, 80, died in London, UK, January 17, 2009, of heart and liver failure

By Ingrid Kerma

Ven. Lobsang Chodron/ Gunavati /Karin Maury was born in Helsinki, Finland. Her mother died giving birth to twins, and her father died shortly afterwards: suicide was suspected. Karin was adopted into a wealthy Swedish-speaking family, and her twin sister remained at the orphanage. Karin traced her sister during her thirties, but could not bring herself to contact her.

Her quest for a spiritual component in her life started early. In her youth she involved herself briefly with the Russian Orthodox Church and experimented with advanced yogic breathing practices to such an extent that she had to seek medical help.

When Karin encountered Buddhism in Helsinki in 1975, she said she immediately realized that Buddhism gave her the practical means to change and to advance spiritually.

The following year she was ordained into the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order. She was given the name Gunavati, meaning abundant good qualities: someone who is trying to develop bodhisattva qualities.

Gunavati's faith was woven into every aspect of her daily

life. She was a practical person, inventive and she loved tools and gadgets. When she wasn't riding around on her motorbike in Finland, she was driving a mini and she made this mini into a kind of prayerwheel by putting a reel of OM MANI PADME HUM into each of the four hubcaps so they would repeat the mantra as she was driving.

Because English wasn't her native language she translated many of the teachings into Swedish, the language she grew up in, in order to make sure that she completely understood and internalized the teachings. Languages were another of her passions. Into her note books and address books she glued typed texts of basic Buddhist teachings in Swedish, Finnish, German and English, so that even looking for a phone number she would come across Dharma teachings.

Gunavati's love for animals is legendary. In Finland she had three dogs and a rescued jackdaw which liked to bite her ears, so she grew her hair over her ears. He had the run of her flat and I've seen photos of her books shredded by the bird.

In London she had her beloved cat Benny, who actually belonged to someone else in the street, but moved in with Gunavati and refused to go back home. The original owners could not hope to compete with the affection Gunavati lavished onto Benny and gladly let her keep him.

One of her favorite outings was to the various city farms with her friend Beate, just to be close to animals and stroke them, particularly the pigs. Even going with her along the road, at the market or in the park, she would stop and talk lovingly to every single dog at great length. That was a very good exercise in the practice of patience for anyone accompanying her. She was very impatient herself, so she said, but had trained herself to be patient by listening to other people's problems.

After completing the two-year course of Geshe Tashi's *Foundation of Buddhist Philosophy*, Gunavati asked for ordination into the FPMT. She received the rabjung ordination from Geshe-la on November 7, 2001 and the getsul ordination in Lavaur, France on July 26, 2002 from Khensur Lobsang Tenzin Rinpoche. She was now Lobsang Chodron, but also was still called Gunavati. Her Dharma practice became even more her daily life.

Gunavati was a great communicator, not just with animals. Again, a walk along Brixton Road to the nearest café took a long time. She would talk to everyone, asking



after their health and listening to their problems. Later some of these people, the shopkeepers and neighbors, would say how she was always so kind, listening to their problems. Many of her friends from years ago would write to her about her influence in their spiritual development.

This practice of loving kindness became visibly pronounced during the last four weeks she spent in Homerton Hospital. She was very weak and her voice was faint, but she would wave to the other patients, stroke the nurses and tell everyone that she loved them over and over again. Her whole being had visibly become compassion. One of the nurses, Maria, said that never had she been moved by anyone in such a short time. She said that Gunavati was exuding such a huge energy, and once that energy was gone its absence would be very strongly felt .

Sorting out her belongings I was struck by the depth of her wide interests. She played the guitar as long as I have

known her, but recently decided to learn to play the violin as well at the age of 80! She constructed intricate traveling shrines for friends. She was an accomplished photographer. She learned the art of thangka painting with Andy Weber.

During her last weeks in hospital her mental intensity and energy seemed to grow immensely. A week before she simply stopped breathing, I said how much I would miss her. Lobsang Chodron replied, "I shall come back. Search for me."

Ven. Barbara and Padmaketu were with her at the time of her passing. Doctors and nurses respected our wish for her not to be touched. We chanted and recited the King of Prayers, the Vajrasattva Mantra and read the Bardo Prayers. Punjavati, Jayachitta, nurse Maria and I washed Lobsang Chodron and dressed her in her robes. I was able to sit with her late into the evening.

I am deeply grateful for having been part of her life.

**Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Dog,
Om Mani Padme Hum, has died**
By Julia Hengst

In the lam-rim we learn about the qualities and characteristics of a precious human rebirth, but is there such a thing as a precious *animal* rebirth? If so, Lama Zopa Rinpoche's dog, Om Mani Padme Hum, probably came as close to a perfect animal rebirth as can be imagined.



Om Mani Padme Hum, who lived at Rinpoche's home in Aptos, California, died on January 8 from cancer. Her death was ideal: Sangha and lay friends recited prayers at her side, mantras played continuously around her, and her body remained untouched for two days after she stopped breathing. Remarkably, for 36 hours after her death there was no smell or any other sign of decomposition, and Ven. Holly Ansett said the house was very peaceful. After a day and a half, blood came from her nose – a clear sign of the consciousness leaving the body and going to higher rebirth.

Om Mani Padme Hum's life was as good as her death. Because her former owner could no longer keep her, Lama Zopa Rinpoche agreed to adopt her. Starting with her name, Rinpoche helped her purify and collect as much merit as possible. So that she would get the full imprint of the mantra, he encouraged everyone to call her by her full name instead of simply "Mani." About giving animals Dharma names, Rinpoche said it "is such an easy way to

benefit animals and bring them closer to enlightenment, and we must attempt every single way to benefit them."

Whenever Rinpoche was in Aptos, he recited a lam-rim prayer to her daily. He helped her concentrate by holding a snack in front of her until he finished the prayer. Rinpoche arranged for a large stupa to be built at the house for her to circumambulate; sometimes Rinpoche picked Om Mani Padme Hum's feet up so that she was circling the stupa on her two back legs. This annoyed the dog, Ven. Holly said, but she may have gotten imprints to walk more like a human. When Om Mani Padme Hum could no longer walk, Rinpoche advised people to take her around the stupa in a wheelbarrow.

Om Mani Padme Hum benefited others, too. Mark Ruggieri, who came several times a week for years to walk her, credits her with bringing him closer to Lama Zopa and the Dharma. One time Om Mani Padme Hum had a hip condition so severe that her veterinarians said without surgery she may never walk again. Instead, Rinpoche prescribed some Tibetan medicine and blessed water, and within weeks she was walking and progressively got better. The vets were astonished. During an earlier bout with cancerous growths, Geshe Ngawang Dakpa performed a puja for the dog and the lumps disappeared, bringing inspiration to those around her.

Upon her death, Rinpoche advised that Medicine Buddha prayers be recited before and after her cremation. She will be greatly missed by many Sangha and friends at Rinpoche's house. ☺