

TURNING WHEEL

The Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism



| CROSSING | BORDERS |

Race • Gender • Culture • Nation • Age
Walls • Cell Doors • Barbed-Wire Fences



From the Editor

On Borders

Some borders are natural, made of mountain ranges and rivers. Human beings make borders, too. Some are physical, made of concrete, white pickets, or barbed wire. Some are theoretical, made by wars or created out of misunderstanding—invisible except as lines drawn on a map.

A border can be beautiful or ugly; it can help or hinder. "Good fences make good neighbors," says Robert Frost in "Mending Wall."

I once had a fight with a neighbor about the fence between our back yards—about how high it should be and who should pay for it. But the birds didn't notice the fence at all. They have borders we humans can't see, governing which part of the redwood tree belongs to which species.

Crossing borders can be scary. It means going into unfamiliar territory—it could be traveling to another country where you don't speak the language, or crossing a border of silence to contact a relative you haven't spoken to in years.

Some people are *forced* to cross borders: refugees in flight, prisoners put behind bars. Some people try to avoid borders, to stay at home and play it safe. But nobody can live without crossing any border at all. There's crossing the street, going to school for the first time, turning 65 and collecting social security (we hope). In this issue of *TW*, people speak of various kinds of borders.

The U.S.-Mexico border has been much in the news lately. In April, "Minutemen" assembled along the Arizona border to prevent "illegal" immigrants from entering. The group plans to extend its presence to the California-Mexico border this August. The official U.S. border patrol is increasing its personnel, as are humanitarian groups who put out water barrels in the desert. On a recent hot weekend, 12 hopeful immigrants died of dehydration in the Arizona desert. On page 28 of this issue, a Mexican woman tells of her own difficult crossing, and of her own near death in the desert.

I recently crossed that same border going the other direction, safely and comfortably, to attend a two-week Zen retreat in Mexico. Of the 40 or so participants, about half were Latin American and half were from north of the border. One of the participants was a Mexican Dominican priest, Padre Pablo, who lives in Chiapas, where he has been working with indigenous people for many years, supporting them in their struggle for justice.

He doesn't speak English and I don't speak Spanish. It so happened that he and I were assigned the job of cleaning the dining room during the morning work period. We didn't have the words to talk to each other about brooms and mops, so we just found the tools, did a lot of pointing and grinning, and somehow managed. Together we lifted a heavy water jug, and together we steadied it to refill the big samovar.

After work period every day, we went into a bilingual discussion group about Meister Eckhart, which I was leading. It turned out that Padre Pablo knows a lot more than I do about Meister Eckhart, and thanks to our able translator, he basically co-taught the class with me. So we went from not being able to say, "How about if you sweep and I mop?" to talking together about whether there's a difference between emptiness and God.

This was a wonderful border crossing, of language, culture, religion, national boundary. And when I connect across so many borders, the connection feels especially powerful to me. That's when I understand that if we really work at it, we human beings can cross all the borders that we human beings make. ❖ —Susan Moon

Coming deadlines for *Turning Wheel*: Winter '05: **Disarmament**. Deadline: Sept. 6, 2005. Spring '06: **No Theme**. Deadline: January 3, 2006.

Send submissions of essays, poetry, drawings, or photographs to *Turning Wheel*, P.O. Box 3470, Berkeley, CA 94703, with SASE; or to <turningwheel@bpf.org>. We also welcome letters. Send to "Editor" at address above or via e-mail.

TURNING WHEEL

The Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism



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The Buddhist Peace Fellowship was founded in 1978 to bring a Buddhist perspective to the peace movement and to bring the peace movement to the Buddhist community.

See insert card for subscription information. Single copies \$7.00 (including postage) from:

BPF National Office

P.O. Box 3470, Berkeley, CA 94703

Tel.: 510/655-6169 Fax: 510/655-1369

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ISSN 1065-058X

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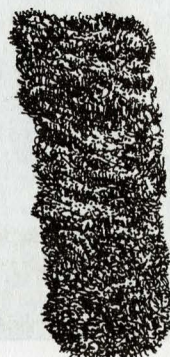
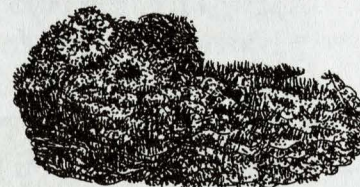
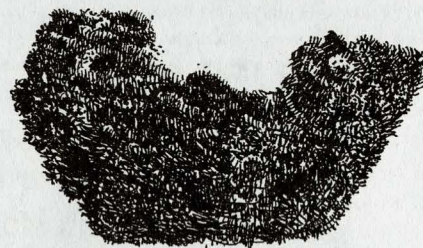
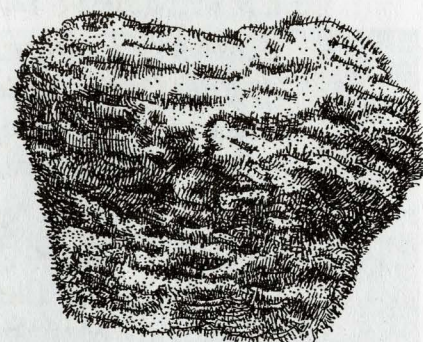
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Hamlet Mateo, *Vanitas: Roses*

Thich Nhat Hanh IN NORTH AMERICA 2005

RETREATS

AUGUST 11 - 16, 2005

*Walking in Peace Today:
Practicing Together in the Midst of Turmoil*
Stonehill College, Easton, MA

AUGUST 20 - 25, 2005

*Touching Peace:
Finding Inner Freedom
Through Understanding and Love*
Bishop's University, Quebec
(teachings will be given in French,
with translation into English)

AUGUST 29 - SEPTEMBER 3, 2005

*Finding True Freedom:
Opening the Door of Understanding & Compassion*
@ the Rocky Mountain YMCA, Estes Park, CO

SEPTEMBER 14 - 18, 2005

*Colors of Compassion:
Healing Our Families, Building True Community*
A Retreat for People of Color
@ Deer Park Monastery, Escondido, CA

SEPTEMBER 28 - OCTOBER 2, 2005

Liberty & the Pursuit of Happiness
@ Deer Park Monastery, Escondido, CA

PUBLIC LECTURES

AUGUST 17 in Boston, MA

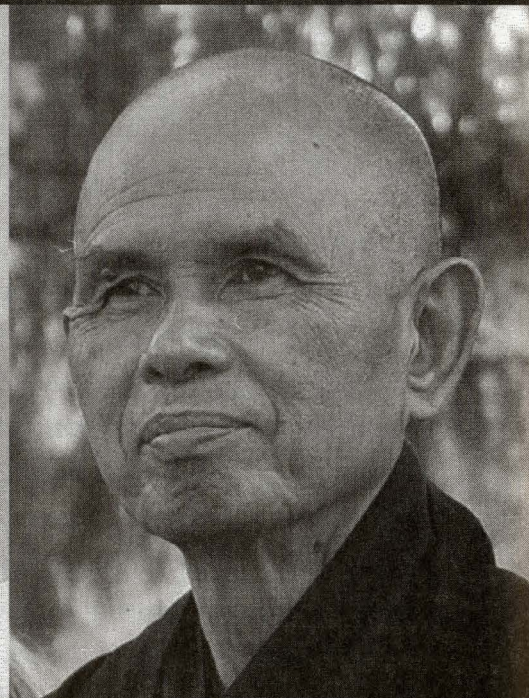
Refreshing Our Hearts: Understanding True Love

AUGUST 26 in Montréal - *Peace in Oneself, Peace in the World*

SEPTEMBER 6 in Denver, CO

Nurturing Togetherness & Peace in a World of Fear & Separation

SEPTEMBER 10 in Pasadena, CA - *Remembrance and Transformation*



"From time to time, we can set aside some time for a retreat or day of mindfulness so we can sit, walk slowly, smile, eat lunch with friends and enjoy being together as though we are the happiest people on Earth. This is not just a treat, it is a retreat.

-Thich Nhat Hanh

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Letters

We welcome your responses to what we print. Write to Turning Wheel, P.O. Box 3470, Berkeley, CA 94703, or send us an e-mail at <turningwheel@bpf.org>. Letters may be edited.

Welcoming People with Disabilities

Thanks for the latest issue of *Turning Wheel* [Spring 2005]. The articles on disability were very thought-provoking. We have a number of people with disabilities who attend our group (at least three with mobility issues, a blind woman, a woman with severe arthritis, and a woman who seems to have Alzheimer's), but it just sort of happened, and we haven't been very intentional about it. I'm thinking now we need to ask them if there are changes that would make our group more inclusive for them.

—Janice Sheppard, Madison, Wisconsin

CREATING CONDITIONS FOR PEACE A Buddhist Peace Fellowship Symposium

Saturday, July 23rd, 2005
9:30 AM–3:30 PM, Berkeley, California
Free, donations welcome

As part of the Tikkun community conference on Spiritual Activism, BPF will draw together a diverse group of engaged Buddhist practitioners, teachers, and activists, to discuss how we can concretely cultivate wisdom and compassion for peace in our local communities and in the world. We encourage those attending this BPF symposium to participate in other parts of the Tikkun conference as well. See www.tikkun.org for more information.

Also visit www.bpf.org or contact Sara at chapters@bpf.org, 510.655.6169, ext. 305

Creating a Legacy of Peace

For more than a quarter of a century, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship has been a compassionate and nonviolent instrument for social change, taking a progressive stance on militarism, disarmament, the death penalty, the prison-industrial complex, and environmental and human rights.

During these challenging times, it is vital that we come together and take action to end suffering and create peace in the world. Your support makes this possible. There are many ways that you can support BPF's work:

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- A gift in tribute to a loved one
- Life insurance and retirement plan gifts
- Inclusion of BPF in your will or trust
- A gift of appreciated securities

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Indra's Net

Compiled by Annette Herskovits

In the image of the "jeweled net of Indra," found in the Avatamsaka Sutra, the universe is represented as an infinite network of jewels, each of which reflects all the others. All our lives touch each other, as symbolized by Indra's net.

Deadly Mexican Border Crossings

The United States sometimes seems to have a split personality. Americans give generously for victims of the tsunami or the 9/11 attack, but many see undocumented immigrants as the "bad guys" in a western movie, while the "good guys" are the border patrol agents who spend 2 million "man" hours a year using infrared cameras, sensing equipment, and surveillance helicopters to trap desperate people on the Mexican border.

This good guy/bad guy fantasy cruelly obscures why the 2.7 million undocumented immigrants who now live in Arizona and California (according to recent Census Bureau estimates) have risked their lives to cross the border. Although each has a personal story, many come because of continued repression and economic inequities, often resulting from our own government's policies.

Increasingly, federal and state governments treat the undocumented as criminals. Government spending on border enforcement has tripled in the last decade, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service has been folded into the new Homeland Security Department. Border sealing programs such as Operation Hold-the-Line (El Paso), Gatekeeper (San Diego), and Safeguard (Arizona) have been beefed up, and the 1,950 agents along the border have been militarized.

All this has made it much harder to pass through inhabited areas, so people now cross through the desert, where temperatures can reach 116 degrees. These people cannot carry enough water to save themselves from dehydration. No More Deaths, a faith-based group in Arizona, estimates that more than 2,000 men, women, and children have perished from heat, exhaustion, and human brutality in this "corridor of death" since 1998.

Voters in Arizona approved a law denying undocumented immigrants all government benefits (the state's attorney general ruled this includes welfare payments) and punishing state employees who do not report undocumented workers. The law is being reviewed in court at this writing.

The U.S. Senate is considering a bill, already passed by the House, that bars states from issuing driver's licenses to the undocumented, allows "bounty hunters" to round up alleged offenders, and makes it easier to reject those seeking political asylum.

The true bodhisattvas are those working with groups like No More Deaths, BorderLinks, and numerous other faith-based nonprofits. The Sonoran Samaritans, for example, rescue migrants in distress, take them to hospitals if necessary, or give them food and water and let them go.

BPF has long been an active member of the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant (EBSC), an interfaith agency providing advocacy and support for refugees from Central America, Africa, and Asia. Our BPF chapter members have taken refugees into their homes, and recently one of us helped a Tibetan monk win asylum. We have, in turn, been educated by the refugees. They are jewels in Indra's net, just as we are, shining for each other.

I would certainly like to hear of other Buddhist groups doing similar work, alone or on an interfaith basis. I would be happy to share resources and ideas about ways in which BPF chapters can get involved.

—Sandy Hunter <sandyh@iopener.net>, East Bay Sanctuary Covenant and BPF East Bay Chapter

Native American Sacred Sites in Jeopardy

Native American sacred sites continue to be threatened in the United States, even more intensely now, as the Bush administration attempts to exploit the nation's oil, gas, and coal resources and to expand nuclear waste storage. In addition, California's water and energy crises have led to the passage of CalFed legislation, which provides \$395 million for studies on increasing California's water supply, including feasibility studies on the raising of Shasta Dam. This legislation has had a negative impact on Native American tribes and created an urgent need for citizen action.

The impact of these crises on the Winnemem Wintu in California, and the Hopi in Arizona, is highlighted in Christopher McLeod's documentary *In the Light of Reverence*. Screenings of the documentary and a panel discussion—focused on better management of existing water supplies and conservation—launched a unique grassroots campaign in March of 2005. This effort unites some of the state's most effective environmental organizations with native communities in an effort to stop the enlargement of Shasta Dam.

The proposal is to raise the dam between 6 and 200 feet, although raising it by just 6 feet would flood the Winnemem's remaining ancestral territory along the McCloud River south of Mount Shasta and submerge many of the tribe's sacred sites. It would also destroy a stretch of what remains of the free-flowing McCloud. In September 2004, the tribe held a four-day war dance for the first time in more than a century, to protest the raising of the dam.

The Winnemem Wintu are struggling to have their status as a federally recognized tribe restored. Such recognition would afford many significant civil and political rights. But it appears that the federal government is resistant to granting this recognition, in part because it would give the tribe more political clout in its protest against the raising of the dam.

McLeod's documentary also describes the efforts of the Hopis and the Diné (Navajo) in Arizona to preserve the land and water of Black Mesa. Peabody Energy Company daily pumps out 3.3 million gallons of pure groundwater from the Black Mesa aquifer in order to transport crushed coal to

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Laughlin, Nevada, 273 miles away, where the coal feeds Southern California Edison's Mojave Generating Station.

This has been going on for more than 30 years. The Black Mesa Trust has been working to educate people about the effects of Peabody's pumping—the poisoned water, for example, is neither reclaimed nor reused. "It's just an epic waste of water to use 1.4 billion gallons of pristine drinking water annually to slurry coal...from a place that doesn't have enough drinking water for the people who live there," says David Beckman, a lawyer with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) who has worked closely with the Hopis for several years.

Ultimately, the trust seeks to stop Peabody's pumping and permanently secure the Navajo Aquifer, with its surrounding springs and watershed, for present and future generations.

To learn more about sacred sites embroiled in conflicts over preservation, resource development, or tourism, or to take action, visit: www.winnememwintu.us, www.blackmesatrust.org, www.nrdc.org/onearth/04fal/blackmesa1.asp. To contact your government representatives, log on at: www.firstgov.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml.

—Chenée Fournier

New Zen Center in Northern Ireland

The first Zen center in Northern Ireland, the Blackmountain Mindfulness Centre, officially opened in February. Paul Haller Roshi, co-abbot of the San Francisco Zen Center, was instrumental in its founding and is its main teacher.

Haller was born in a Catholic enclave of Belfast and lived there in his early 20s during the first five years of "the Troubles" that pitted Catholics against Protestants. He left Belfast in 1972 and traveled through Europe and Asia, ending up as a monk in Thailand. Yearning to practice in the West, he came across Suzuki Roshi's book *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, and appeared one day in 1974 at the San Francisco Zen Center, where he has remained ever since.

The suffering Haller witnessed and experienced in Belfast left him with "a deep sadness to hold." Seven years ago, he went back to Belfast to work with victims from both sides of the conflict, organize retreats, and teach meditation.

Eventually, two of Haller's students, Frank and Brenda Liddy, decided the time had come to establish a center for the people of Belfast. Haller, who attended the opening celebration, remarked on the many community programs for building peace in Northern Ireland. "We feel that Buddhist training offers a unique contribution to facilitate that," he said. He led a four-day retreat and ordained five lay practitioners. ❖

There is something out in the dark that wants to correct us.
Each time I think "this," it answers "that."

—from "Against Certainty," by Jane Hirshfield

Divesting from Israel

by Annette Herskovits

A movement that calls on people and institutions to stop investing in companies that profit from Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories is spreading to churches, universities, and cities throughout the United States.

In July 2004, the governing body of the Presbyterian Church (PC-USA)—with 3 million members and \$8 billion in investments—approved “selective divestment” by a 431-to-62 vote. The church will select multinational corporations that sell goods and services used to maintain the military occupation, expand Israeli settlements, build the separation barrier, or otherwise do violence against Palestinian civilians. Other religious bodies have since recommended divestment, including the World Council of Churches, a gathering of 347 Protestant and Orthodox denominations.

Many churches evidently concur with Presbyterian official Victor Makari: “We as a church have spoken for many years protesting [Israel’s] occupation of the Palestinian territories...and all the unjust actions, such as the building of settlements, the destruction of Palestinian homes, the diverting of water.” But the occupation only got worse, so “a different strategy was needed.”

Mainstream Jewish organizations reacted angrily to the Presbyterians’ vote, charging antisemitism and a double standard—“demonizing Israel while whitewashing Palestinian terrorism,” in the words of Rabbi Ira Youdovin.

PC-USA’s Vernon Broyles III responded, “The call for balance is ludicrous when one party has overwhelming military, political, and economic power.” Divestment is appropriate since the U.S. government turns a blind eye to Israel’s human rights violations, and “our tax dollars...enable the occupation, the expansion of the settlements, and the construction of the Separation Barrier.” (In 2004, Israel received almost one-sixth of all U.S. foreign aid, most of it military.) Broyles also reaffirmed the church’s commitment to “Israel’s right to land and security” and its condemnation of Palestinian acts of terror.

Mainstream Jewish organizations that support Israel unwaveringly claim to speak for the entire Jewish community, but journalist Esther Kaplan found that the membership of groups critical of Israeli policies is climbing. Some of these groups protested the divestment campaign (for example, Peace Now, the oldest Israeli peace movement), but a growing number of Israeli and Jewish peace groups are formulating positions supporting selective divestment.

The views, needs, and wishes of Palestinians hardly figure in this debate. To Palestinians, the divestment movement brings hope. Father Jamal Khader, a Catholic priest in Bethlehem, said, “This is the first time that we’ve heard of anything concrete being done, not just opposing [the occupation] in words.”

Opponents of divestment ask, Why divest when Israel is pursuing peace with its “disengagement plan” and preparing to withdraw troops and settlers from Gaza? Perhaps the best answer came in October 2004 from Dov Weisglass, then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s senior adviser. He described Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza as “formaldehyde”—a way to freeze the peace process. He said that in the end, “part of the settlements would not be dealt with at all, and the rest will not be dealt with until the Palestinians turn into Finns.” In other words, by giving up Gaza, Israel hopes to be able to keep most of the West Bank.

And indeed, in March, Sharon announced the construction of 3,650 additional housing units in the Maaleh Adumim settlement, in a westward expansion that would complete the surrounding of Arab East Jerusalem with Israeli settlements, thus destroying the possibility of a continuous Palestinian state. Meeting with Sharon in April, President Bush did object to the construction but reiterated his earlier promise that negotiations on final borders should recognize “new realities on the ground, including major Israeli population centers [West Bank settlements].” Sharon later said construction would proceed.

Churches that embrace divestment can help educate Americans about their government’s policies in Palestine/Israel and counter the fervent Zionism of fundamentalist churches that see the Jews’ return to the Holy Land as a portent of the Second Coming.

And maybe divestment can, in a peaceful way, make Israelis more aware of the suffering their government inflicts on the Palestinians—something many Israelis succeed in keeping out of mind—and help them see through Sharon’s hollow promises of security. Sharon’s goal is a Palestine made up of separate enclaves, with the Israeli army controlling borders, movement of persons and goods, and water. No such state has ever existed. Divestment may also open a path out of self-defeating violence for the Palestinian resistance.

Amira Hass, the only Israeli journalist living in the Territories, wisely said, “Israel insists now to get its way, thanks to its military superiority. Now this is very dangerous for the Israelis, because this state of being militarily superior will fire back after 20 years, 30 years, I don’t know how long.”

Action Alert: The U.S. company Caterpillar produces the D9 armored bulldozers that Israel uses to level Palestinian homes, uproot orchards, and build the separation barrier. Jewish Voice for Peace, together with groups of Catholic nuns, has initiated a campaign to stop Caterpillar’s sales of D9s; ordinary citizens and shareholders can help. See www.catdestroyshomes.org. ❖

Annette Herskovits writes on politics and human rights (including Turning Wheel’s Indra’s Net column) and practices at the Berkeley Zen Center.

BPF & Activist Notes

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the tragic atomic bombings of the Japanese cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The unleashing of the atomic bomb on civilian populations caused unprecedented destruction of life and a loss of our common humanity. The 60th birthday is particularly significant in Japanese culture as it celebrates long life. The greatest gift to the *hibakusha* (survivors of the atomic bombings) and to the world would be to initiate negotiations for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

August 6 and 9 will be days of national actions to oppose U.S. nuclear policy. On August 6, join with people at four central U.S. nuclear weapons sites in major actions calling for an end to the development and production of nuclear warheads. Activities will recognize the devastation caused by nuclear weapons and memorialize their many victims.

Livermore Nuclear Weapons Lab, California

Music, dinner, rally, and candlelight march

Saturday, August 6, 5 PM

William Payne Park

5800 Patterson Pass Rd., Livermore, CA

Contact: Tara Dorabji, Tri-Valley CAREs,

<tara@trivalleycares.org>, 925/443-7148,

www.trivalleycares.org.

Los Alamos Nuclear Weapons Lab, New Mexico

Teach-in, workshops, music, candle ritual, and meditation

Saturday, August 6, 8:30 AM to 10:00 PM

Ashley Pond Park in Los Alamos, New Mexico

Contact: Pax Christi New Mexico, 505/870-2275,

www.paxchristinewmexico.org; and Upaya Zen Center,

Joan Halifax, 505/986-8182, www.upaya.org.

Nevada Test Site

Conference, speakers, storytelling, nonviolence trainings, liturgy, music, performance, and workshops

Thursday-Sunday, August 4-7

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and the Nevada Test Site

Contact: Nevada Desert Experience, 702/646-4814,

www.nevadadesertexperience.org and www.paxchristiusa.org,

<nde_youth@peacenet.org>.

Y-12 Nuclear Facility, Tennessee

Names ceremony, peace march, rally, and direct action

Saturday, August 6, all day

Y-12 National Security Complex, Oak Ridge, Tennessee

Contact: Ralph Hutchison, Oak Ridge Environmental

Peace Alliance, <orep@earthlink.net>, 865/483-8202,

www.stopthebombs.org.

On Aug 9, there will be candlelight vigils at city halls across the country. To organize one in your community, contact: Jackie Cabasso, Western States Legal Foundation, <wslf@earthlink.net>, 510/839-5877, www.wslfweb.org.

August 6 and 9 National Days of Remembrance and Action coordinated by Abolition Now!, Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Nevada Desert Experience, Nuclear Age Foundation, Pax Christi New Mexico, Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance, Tri-Valley CAREs, United for Peace and Justice, and Western States Legal Foundation.


BPF Prison Project News

Three pieces of exciting news for the Prison Program! First, a rare piece of good news about the death penalty. We were invited to submit a Buddhist statement for the Simmons case amicus brief over a year ago. This case sought to overturn the law permitting executions of juveniles. After a long fight, on March 1, 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court decided to finally end this barbaric practice. See www.bpf.org for more details.

At this writing, we are choosing a new prison program coordinator. I will stay on as prison program director (as well as associate director of programs), and in the next issue of *Turning Wheel*, I'll introduce our new staff member.

And finally, Executive Director Maia Duerr and I represented BPF as speakers at the April 2005 Women and Buddhism conference at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. Close to 2,000 people attended from 26 states, and the level of enthusiasm rocked the entire campus! bell hooks gave a rousing keynote address, and panel topics ranged from race, class, and privilege to women teaching the Dharma. People flocked to a wide range of workshops. And as always, some of the pithiest conversations happened in the cafés around campus.

—Diana Lion



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History

Jueqing, the Reluctant Political Dissident

by Diane Patenaude Ames

Little is known about the nun Jueqing (early 16th century) beyond the fact that she was born somewhere near Nanjing, into a family that belonged to Ming China's educated elite class. Despite her background, she decided to become a Buddhist nun and retreated to a small rural convent so poor that the nuns had to grow their own vegetables. By 1537 she became the abbess there. To all appearances, she had escaped from the outside world and its messy politics.

However, 1537 was the year that the secretary of the Board of Rites for the Nanjing area, a fanatical Confucian named Huo Tao, decided to get rid of local Buddhist convents once and for all. For a man like him, the principle that every woman must be subject to the authority of some man throughout her life—first her father, then her husband, and eventually her own adult son—could have no exceptions. Thus the spectacle of nuns living in self-governing all-female communities was an affront. Besides, the function of women was to bear sons to carry on the family line. Clerical celibacy was always somewhat difficult for the intensely family-oriented Chinese to swallow, and female celibacy was doubly so. Finally, convents encouraged laywomen to develop a religious life of their own. That meant

that they had some kind of life outside the family, which was considered an intolerable situation. The fact that respectable women were going to nunneries to attend Buddhist ceremonies and teachings seems to have preyed on Huo Tao's mind more than anything else.

To put an end to this, Huo Tao issued a decree that all Buddhist convents in the area were to be abruptly closed. Nuns under 40 were ordered to marry at once. Older nuns were commanded to return to their natal families or go live in public almshouses. By and large, Huo Tao's orders seem to have been carried out. However, the abbess Jueqing decided to do something considered unthinkable at the time: she defied the government. When the authorities came around to her convent, they found only a now famous poem she had written on the wall: "In haste and hurry we gather up our tattered robes.... Sleeves brushing white clouds, we retreat to the cave's mouth." Since Jueqing and her followers were almost certainly risking execution, it is to be hoped that they made a successful escape and reached some place with a more tolerant Board of Rites.

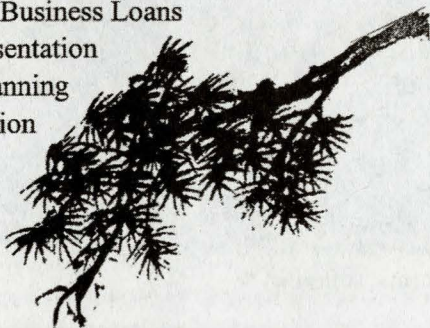
That any citizens, let alone a group of women, should rebel in this way so that they could continue the kind of spiritual practice they wished to pursue must have shocked everybody.

But Jueqing, who had never asked for anything but to be left alone to meditate, proved willing to take extreme measures to defend that privilege, showing that even the most reclusive of practitioners cannot always remain apolitical. ❖

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Containing the Damage

by Stephanie Kaza

Vermont is nowhere close to the border of Iraq. But this spring it got a little closer. In Vermont, right when the year seems stuck between winter and greenup, the legislative season is hitting its stride. Our legislature begins work in January and tries to wrap everything up by May. Any bills or resolutions that have any hope of being passed into law must be well out of committee and onto the House and Senate floor by April. This year representatives of Rockingham, Westminster, Springfield, East Montpelier, and Williston offered a resolution urging federal support services for veterans exposed to depleted uranium.

Depleted uranium (DU), the bill said, poses a major health hazard to soldiers who have fought and are fighting in the Persian Gulf, the Balkans, and Iraq. And further, the biological effects may be transmitted genetically to the children of these soldiers. And whereas, the representatives stated, the overwhelming source of DU is veterans' inhalation of DU aerosols (formed on impact of munitions), they called on the General Assembly of Vermont to urge the Department of Defense to cease the use of DU-coated munitions.

Why is depleted uranium so capable of penetrating bodies, cells, and chromosomes? DU is the leftover "waste" when natural uranium is enriched to make reactor fuel or nuclear

weapons. It is not the potent supermaterial of nuclear nightmares, but it is far from inert. In fact, it is quite potent in its own way. Being extremely dense (twice as heavy as lead) and able to burn on impact, it is the modern munition material of choice for the Pentagon. Not so much for searing human flesh but for penetrating "enemy" tanks and walls and armor—tough borders meant to protect. When DU hits a hard surface, it burns a sharp clean hole, leaving behind karmic plumes of radioactive dust. Think of each little dust particle as a karmic mote, a small time bomb that will go off in the lungs of a soldier or a child or a weeping woman.

As depleted uranium decays, it gives off radiation in the bone and soft tissues of the human body, causing cells to go awry and become cancerous. The radiation is carried from battlefield to hometown, passing through every security checkpoint. It beams through cell walls, and on through strands of genes. From there it is only a matter of time before the karmic story crosses borders into the next generation. Without any nuclear bomb ever being dropped, the radioactive karma spreads across the land unhindered. How to check this stream of suffering, this unwanted consequence of human ingenuity and conflict? How to uphold the natural borders of cells, bodies, places, and generations, and protect them from assault?

The Vermont resolution calls for cutting off the source of the suffering at its root by completely ceasing the use of DU weapons. This would halt any further generation of suffering from these weapons. At the same time, we would also need to contain the existing damage. We would have to clean up the soils contaminated by munitions plants (in Minnesota, Indiana, and Massachusetts) and the radioactive battlefields of Iraq and Kuwait. We would want to do everything we could to keep this bad idea from spreading more bad karma.

Because the half-life of DU is longer than any of us or our children or grandchildren will live, this is not going to be easy. We cannot think of this work in human-time terms. We will need to draw on the grand impossible time schemes evoked in the Mahayana sutras and shift our intention to the truly long term. This is another kind of border crossing, from human limitation to bodhisattva unending energy. The imagination can go there; so can the human heart. This vastness beyond vastness knows no borders. It offers the perfect haven for longer-than-lifetime work. Taking DU as a practice partner, we can walk into this vastness and imagine the end of harmful streams of karmic suffering. ❖

no passport
the frog just hops
across the border

—Karma Tenzing Wangchuk

In the fall of 2005, Karma Tenzing Wangchuk will be entering a three-year retreat in Northern California.

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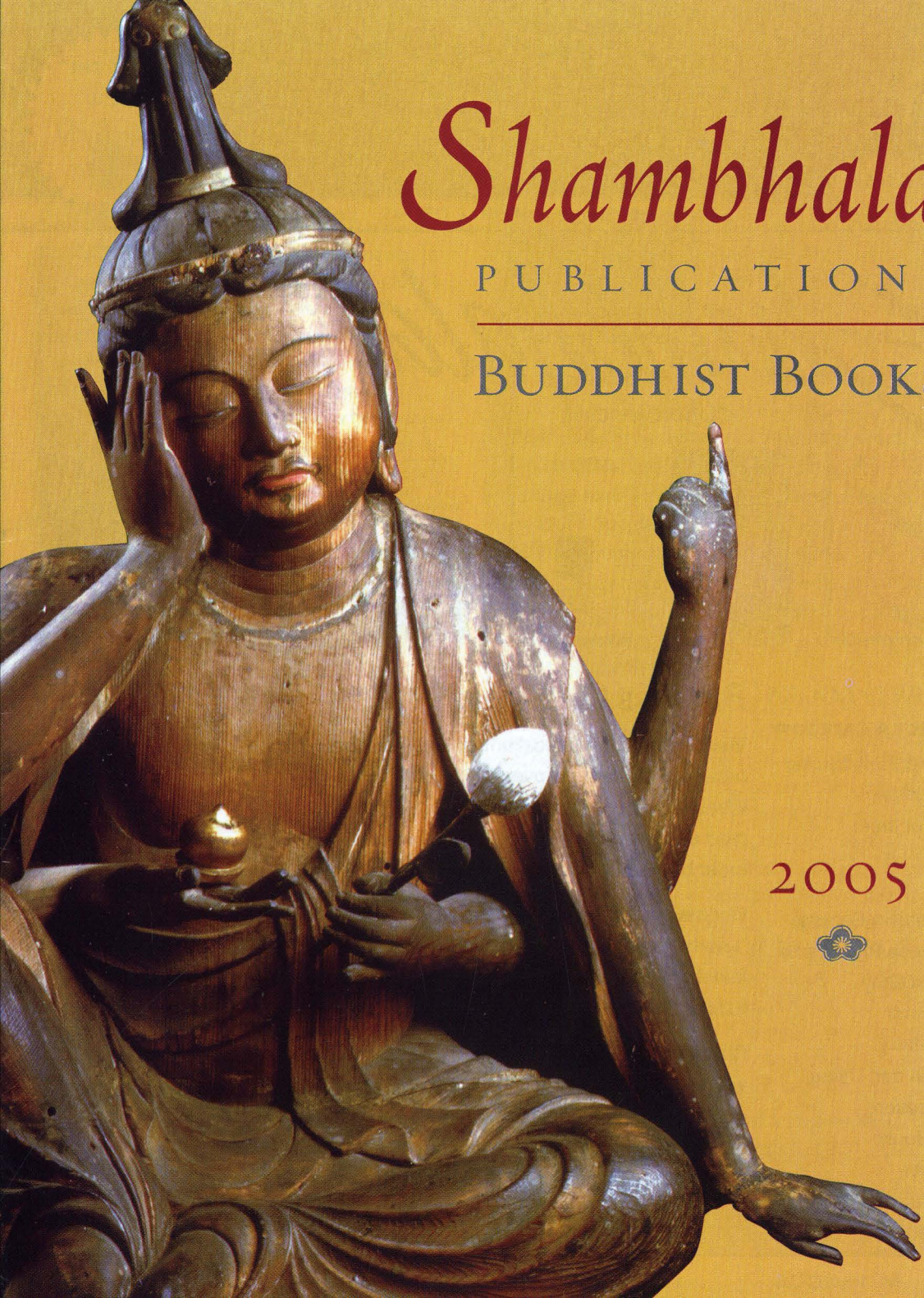
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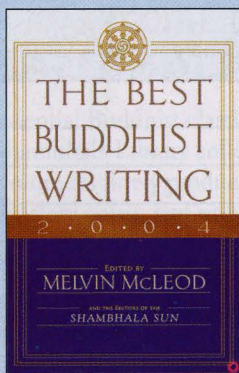
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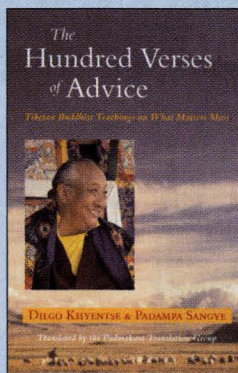
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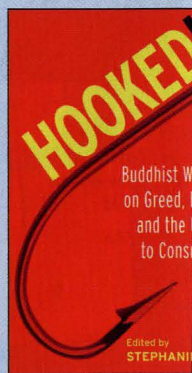
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Family Practice

"How Do You Know All That?" Volunteering in the Public Schools

by Mushim Ikeda-Nash

*You are the lamp
To lighten the way.
Then hurry, hurry.*

—from *The Dhammapada: Sayings of the Buddha*,
trans. Thomas Byrom

Our school district's high schools are "dropout factories," according to researchers. A recent study I found in the newspaper reports that 52 percent of Oakland public highschool students drop out before graduation. The district ran out of money a couple of years ago, and the state of California took over, firing the superintendent and demoting the school board to advisory status. Suffice it to say our family has seen a lot happen at our son's schools in the past 11 years—racial tensions between teachers, emergency evacuations of mold-ridden classrooms, a custodian who inexplicably destroyed all the third-graders' art in a classroom one summer. And then there was the mysterious award for perfect attendance of all students received by a dazed principal, who then found that the secretary had been squirreling away a giant pile of excuse notes for ill students and had never reported a single absence! It's been a wild ride, and my husband, son, and I have developed the ability to remain phlegmatic when it comes to news about the schools. It's possible that if Godzilla surfaced out of Lake Merritt in downtown Oakland and flamed the roof of the district headquarters, maybe then we'd get excited.

I consider my volunteer work in the schools as the most important arena of spiritual practice outside of my work at home. Since Josh started kindergarten, I've given an average of one day a week to his schools, assisting teachers with whatever needed to be done, serving on school committees, and tutoring or teaching reading and writing. Every once in a while, stressed out by chaos at the school, I ask myself why I'm running around trying to find a key to the school library so that there is a quiet space to tutor a child with a learning disability, or why I am watching kids on a birthday cake sugar-high run around the playground screaming.

But, deep down, I know why I'm there. It's the same reason that I wanted to be a work-at-home mom for Josh when he was little, and the same reason that I've remained Buddhist since I took the precepts in 1983. *I want to be present for the moment of learning, the flash of connection, the great "aha!"* I don't want to miss any of it: the first step, the first word, the first algebra test, the first realization that Schrodinger's cat is, oddly enough, both alive and dead. I want to be there when my son makes the connection: "Wow! Mom and I aren't the same person!" I want to witness his first spiritual insight that

there is no mom and there is no me and yet, oddly enough, there is love, and there is basic goodness.

I want to be there when a fourth grader who's still an emerging reader points at a photo of "The Rock" in his pro-wrestling magazine and asks, "How do you know all this stuff about wrestling?" and I say, "Because it says so right here, and I can read it." And I want to be there to listen when a high school student I'm trying to help says, "I'm upset because my cousin was arrested over the weekend and is in jail." Whether I'm actively "teaching," or serving on an interview committee to hire a new teacher, or just kind of hanging out at the school listening to hip-hop at lunchtime, I know I don't want to miss this for the world. Dissimilar as the environments may seem on the surface, to me the school feels a lot like a Zen meditation hall during a retreat when the air is electrically charged with effortful learning.

Recently Greg, my son's tenth grade advisor, and I were pondering the real function of a high school, beyond simply trying to transmit facts and figures. What are we really trying to "teach" students in four years? As I'm talking, I see the "kids" in my mind. They aren't children any longer. As teenagers, they're capable of making babies, earning wages, falling in and out of love, repairing computers, driving cars, and fighting wars.

"Speaking as a parent," I said to Greg, "I'd like to see you help the kids develop into lifetime learners. And to do that means they have to have stability and self-confidence, and they have to know how to go beyond their fears and limitations."

This is why I volunteer in the Oakland public schools, to extend my sense of family to the next level, and to try to be there, learning alongside everyone else. I'm not alone. There are other parents and community members there too, working without pay. You won't usually hear about us or read about us in the newspapers, but we're in the classrooms too. Come and see for yourself. ❖

What comes out of your mouth is what you become.
And if you don't speak, that too is worth noting.

—from "Body As What Is Remembered," by Tsering Wangmo Dhompa

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**IN THE
FOOTSTEPS
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Young Writer's Award Winner!

In this issue of *Turning Wheel* the award is shared by two writers.

What Should I Call Myself?

by William Tyler

Imaginary borders between myself and the rest of humanity have enabled me to commit crimes and have led to my long-term imprisonment. Transcending these mental borders has been a chief preoccupation throughout my life. But the racial border I have running right down my middle is very real: my mother is white and my father is black.

My parents divorced when I was very young and I did not see my father again until much later in my life. I was raised in a middle class home by my white mother and stepfather. Like many bright-but-wild children, I had little interest in school or church. Much of my misbehavior was typical child's play, but eventually I took my rebellion to extremes. I started hanging out with older kids, using drugs, and getting into serious trouble—stealing from stores and burglarizing homes.

By the time I was 13, I was living in a long-term group home. Everything went downhill from there. I floated around in animal mind and never felt obligated to my family, my community, or any standard of behavior. I learned to make myself at home in state institutions and prisons over the next 10 years. I did make a few attempts at getting my life on track, but I would inevitably return to my familiar scene: drugs, crime, and delusion. I may have been foolish, selfish, and dishonest, but I was hardly tough.

Fitting In

California's Youth Authority and the Department of Corrections both practice segregation. Everything is divided racially, including exercise equipment, day-rooms, yard areas, televisions, dining tables, telephones, and showers. Even cellmates are determined by race, which is literally posted on cell doors—blue paper is used for black inmates, pink and green for hispanics, white for whites, and yellow for "other." In another prison I spent time in, race and gang affiliation were stated on the door next to our names. It's impossible to imagine such an atmosphere without seeing it firsthand! I had a difficult time adjusting.

My mom is Irish and I inherited her red hair and pale complexion. Unlike her, I get darker in the sun—my father's contribution—but without sunlight I quickly return to pale. I also have my mom's freckles strewn about my face, which doesn't help to lend any meanness to my look.

Here in prison, I felt neither tough enough nor cool enough to blend naturally with the black inner-city

crowd, yet I was too black to hang out with the white kids, most of whom were becoming white supremacists for their own survival. I maintained a facade of strength, despite being scared and entirely out of my element. I doubt if anybody takes to such conditions naturally, but it sure seemed as though I was the only one who didn't know where I belonged.

I soon began pretending to fit in with the black inmates. I consciously began speaking slang and disassociating myself from the nonblack inmates. Anything requiring more than the basic courtesy was out of the question. Over the span of a few years, I joined a prison gang and accepted a Swahili name. I got some tattoos: "AFRICAN" in large letters across my stomach, a black panther on my bicep, and a map of Africa on my shoulder. I started wearing my hair in braids and worked out with weights until my muscles bulged all over.

Of course I was living many lies, but there was a degree of comfort in my newfound acceptance among the group and in my new sense of identity. I started thinking that my whole life before entering prison was a farce, and that I was finally beginning to find myself. Perhaps the saddest truth is that I had had no idea of who I was prior to entering prison because I had never looked within. But the identity that I found in prison was false, based upon outward appearances, tattoos, braids, muscles, gang affiliation, peer approval, and a Swahili name.

Nonetheless, "blackness" was becoming synonymous with "realness" for me. "Keeping it real" meant listening to black music, reading Afrocentric literature, and speaking and acting in ways accepted as cool. At one point I even asked my mom to call me "Dadisi," Swahili for inquisitive, or nothing at all. Mom held fast to "Billy" and stopped writing me for a while.

Seeking Truth

I am grateful for the entire identity crisis, because without such obvious problems I may never have begun to search for answers. And who can say that being lost isn't as important as being found?

By the age of 24 I'd earned a sentence of 15 years in state prison for my second robbery conviction. I had already served time in many California state prisons including San Quentin; Deuel Vocational Institute, in Tracy; California Correctional Center, in Wasco; and Corcoran State Prison. In 1999 I moved into the High Desert State Prison in Susanville, where I shared a cell

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with a brother named Mike who was serving four life sentences plus 79 years. My friendship with him changed the course of my life.

Mike had become a Christian while on trial for a double-murder robbery. He had one of those spectacular conversion stories. He'd been shot several times and, lying in the street, was nearly bleeding to death when he heard an interior voice ask him, "Where are you going to run now?" He woke up in a hospital bed a week later surrounded by police. He became a Christian when he accepted that he had nowhere else to run. I was impressed by his testimony, but I let him know that I would never become a Christian. I still considered myself a gang member, and to me, Christianity and gangs were mutually exclusive concepts.

I embraced Mike and respected his strength of character. Living with such a devout person led me to question what my life was truly about. I started going to church with him, not because I was interested in it, but because we had become close friends. We read books aloud together and compared notes in our attempts at writing essays and poetry. We even compiled a book of our poetry together, called *Onward and Upward*, but it was lost in the mail when we sent it to be typed.

We talked a lot about the ways we both had suffered. We had both been abused children, and we had both wasted our lives running amok and hurting others. Our cell eventually became a haven where prison politics were not welcome. We spent all of our time studying, talking, or exercising. Neither of us owned a TV or a radio, and the 18 months we spent as cellmates were quite productive. Our discussions led me to quit using drugs and alcohol entirely and to give Narcotics Anonymous another try.

I started attending Muslim and Catholic services in addition to the Protestant services Mike and I already attended together. I never really seriously considered joining any of them, but I went for the fellowship. I listened to the teachings, but I still desired a deeper reality that I could experience for myself. I wanted to find the transformation that Mike had found, but I didn't want to bind myself to another exclusive group. I did manage to make friends with members of every religion. Those friendships helped change my view of the world.

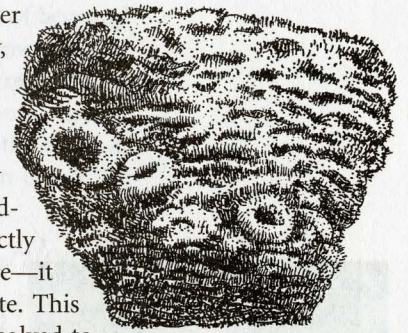
Over time, I started to feel moral pressure over the ways in which I remained untrue to myself. For instance, Mike and I had come to the agreement that we would defend ourselves without weapons in the event of a riot. Neither of us wanted to fight anybody, let alone stab someone. Yet I still manufactured knives for my prison-gang comrades. After many discussions with Mike, I stopped making knives altogether, knowing that he would help me if I fell victim to violence.

The same scenario played out over drugs. I'd stopped using them personally, but my prison-gang comrades were still using and selling. Drugs are foremost on every prisoner's mind because they provide both income and a temporary escape. I finally confronted the issue head-on and explained to my comrades exactly why I couldn't transport drugs anymore—it was not a matter I was willing to debate. This was a difficult position to take, but I resolved to accept the consequences. Thankfully there were few. I was tested often to see how serious I was about the changes I'd made. I reiterated my position repeatedly.

Once those major moral issues had been settled, the gates of change opened for me. One Saturday afternoon at Catholic services the deacon asked me if I would begin an interracial men's support group at the prison. He told me about Patrick Nolan, an inmate at New Folsom State Prison, who had founded many successful groups there, including the Inside Circle Foundation, a volunteer organization that helps bring outside sponsorship to the men's movement inside prisons. We held the first interracial men's support group at High Desert State Prison in 2001.

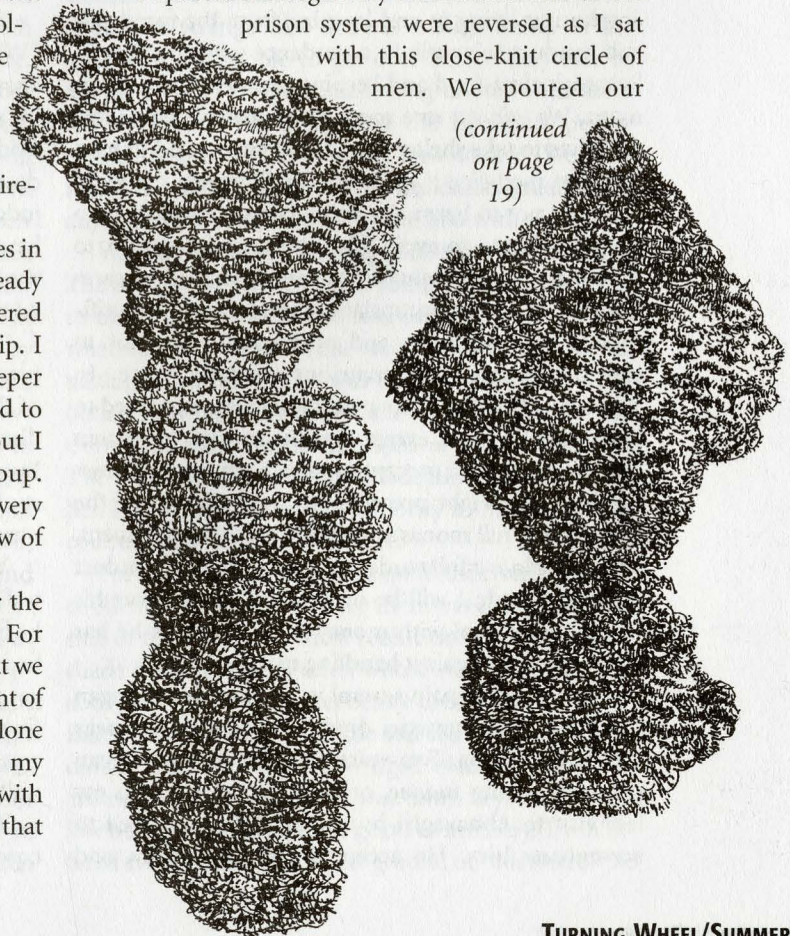
Belonging to the men's group inspired me to seek complete change. Many of the decisions I made that impacted me negatively when I first entered the prison system were reversed as I sat with this close-knit circle of men. We poured our

(continued
on page
19)



Vanitas: Roses
Drawings by
Hamlet Mateo

Hamlet Mateo grew up in the Dominican Republic, and now lives in Sonoma County, California. He has practiced Zen meditation since 1998.



American Tudong

An Experiment in Wandering

by Austin Stewart

Before the Walk: The Theory

My house is a mess. Camping gear and paperwork commingle on the couch and flow down onto the floor. My bed I would rather not talk about. The only place that has survived the storm is the shrine; it is orderly and clean. This scene is a reflection of my mind—sometimes busy, sometimes calm.

I am preparing to embark on a very long walk as the lay supporter of Venerable Jotipalo Bhikkhu. Our six-month journey will take us along the Mississippi River from New Orleans north to Thunder Bay, Canada.

Ven. Jotipalo is a monk in the Thai forest tradition of Theravada Buddhism. This lineage has distinguished itself through its

strict adherence to the Vinaya, a code of discipline set forth by the Buddha. As its name suggests, the lineage emphasizes living in and learning from the forest. We will conduct this walk in accordance with the Vinaya, living on alms-food and keeping our needs to a minimum. We will eat one meal a day, and we will allow ourselves to take shelter from the elements and to have access to medicine if we are ill. I will live by the Eight Precepts: not to harm any living being, not to steal, to remain celibate, to avoid false and harmful speech, to refrain from consuming intoxicants that lead to carelessness, to eat at appropriate times, to avoid beautification, entertainment, and adornment, and not to sleep on a high or luxurious sleeping place. In Theravada Buddhism lay practitioners are supposed to follow the first five, except that the precept to remain celibate becomes a precept to refrain from sexual misconduct. The eight precepts are a refinement of the five, and the full monastic code is a further refinement. Ven. Jotipalo is a fully ordained monk and will conduct himself as such. I will be on this walk to support his needs and to deal with money if necessary, as he has taken a precept against handling money.

I met Ven. Jotipalo several years ago when I began studying at Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery near Ukiah, California. Two years ago, Ven. Jotipalo began planning a long *tudong*, or walk, in the U.S. On my last visit to Abhayagiri in May of 2004, I offered to accompany him. He accepted enthusiastically, and

Ajahn Pasanno, the abbot of Abhayagiri, gave us his blessing. I think he could see that our personalities would fit together well. Ajahn Amaro, the co-abbot, said that on *tudong* you have much freedom and yet you are handcuffed to this other person. My friend Bob says, "If you want to know if a marriage will last, spend six months together on a small sailboat." (Or go on *tudong* together!) We will be dependent on each other for survival, and stressful situations will surely arise. Most days we will spend every waking hour within sight of each other. Our ability to get along well will be crucial for the success of the walk.

I have watched Ven. Jotipalo over the last several years and have seen how the practice has changed the way he reacts to stressful situations. I was confident that if difficulties arose between us he would deal with them skillfully, and he told me that he thought the same about me. (His judgment may or may not be accurate!) We are friends, and we are in the process of becoming deeper friends, friends in the Dharma.

People have been asking us two main questions: "Why?" and, "Why the Midwest and South?" In answer to the second question, Ven. Jotipalo says that in addition to the fact that he was raised in the Midwest, his heart told him this was a good place to do it. When I first considered walking with him, my judgments about his itinerary created the sounds of a lynch mob in my mind. And partly because I *did* have those judgments, I decided to walk with him. I wanted to challenge my own resistance.

The first question is much bigger. What is the purpose of the walk? We will presumably raise awareness of Buddhism in middle America; we will undoubtedly discuss the Dharma and our way of life with people. But these are not the full reasons for the walk. The study of the mind is the core of this walk. When we cast ourselves into uncertainty, how will the mind respond?

Ven. Jotipalo originally wanted to call this a peace walk, but he has changed his mind, or, more accurately, he has changed his vocabulary. Unfortunately, *peace* has become a political word, a divisive word. If you want to get people riled up, talk about peace. Flash people two fingers and there's a good chance they will show you one. We will have to find other words to describe our walk to people.

The practice of generosity is one of the Buddha's core teachings; it is a foundation for lasting happiness.



Austin Stewart

On this walk, we give people the opportunity to show generosity. Ven. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, the abbot of Metta Forest Monastery in San Diego County, says, "The act of giving creates a spacious world: a world where generosity is an operating principle, a world where people have more than enough, enough to share. And it creates a good feeling in the mind."

Buddhism is a wilderness tradition. Not only the Buddha himself, but many great teachers, including the Sixth Zen Patriarch, the great Thai teacher Ajahn Mun Bhuridatto, and the Tibetan saint Milarepa, spent years wandering through the forest, sitting in caves and on mountaintops. Buddhist practice in the U.S. does not include forest practice and is generally confined to cities and sitting groups, and the occasional monastery and retreat center. But the Buddha trained in the forest, realized enlightenment in the forest, and lived the remainder of his life in the forest. Ven. Thanissaro Bhikkhu writes on the importance of this practice: "Faced with the physical and mental dangers of wilderness living, [monks] find that the Dharma provides their refuge, their prime means of survival. This gives them an appreciation and a practical understanding of the Dharma that cannot be learned from books."

Ven. Jotipalo and I will be walking through a different kind of wilderness than the one the Buddha walked through—a "conquered" wilderness inhabited largely by people who have never had any contact with our way of life. Private land is the dominant feature, automobiles the dominant form of transportation. Though we are both native sons, we will be very foreign. I do not know what the outcome of this walk will be, but perhaps it will encourage others to experiment with this practice, to let go of the comfort of their homes and monasteries and learn from the wilderness.

I expect the challenge for me will not be the walking or the exposure to the elements—I have spent enough days and nights outside to be unperturbed by bad weather. The challenge will be the uncertain nature of homelessness, and, in particular, not knowing when we will eat next. Wandering mendicants in Asia can be fairly sure that they will be fed every day, but we will not have that confidence. Greed for food is easy enough to set aside when you know you will not miss your next meal, but how loud will the mind protest when your next meal is not guaranteed?

When we think of survivors, we tend to think of hardened men and women with sharp wits and sharper eyes, whose posture says, "Don't even *think* about messing with me!" An image of Clint Eastwood comes to mind. But to survive this walk, will we need a hardening or a softening? You can be a total jerk without risking your comfort and safety if you have a place to sleep and food to eat, but how does that change when

you embrace the humility of homeless life, of begging?

The mind is terrified of the unknown. Every morning of this walk the unknown will greet us with the sun. We will not be able to get around it, and thinking about that causes fear to arise in the mind, at least in *my* mind. However, the unknown is just the

If you want to get people riled up, talk about peace. Flash people two fingers and there's a good chance they will show you one.

unknown; it is neither good nor bad. My fears are based in ignorance. If I act heedlessly, I could walk around the earth and be no wiser than when I started, whereas one heedful step has the potential to lead to total awakening.

On the Walk: The Reality

Ven. Jotipalo and I seriously underestimated how difficult this walk was going to be. It is not the walking that is hard. Nor is it getting enough to eat, as I had feared. It turns out to be finding a place to sleep. The people we meet look at us with distrust, even disgust. Ven. Jotipalo is wearing the traditional gold-brown robes of the Thai forest tradition; I am dressed in gray clothes. We both have shaved heads and eyebrows. We appear so strange that there is a huge hump of the unknown for people to get over before they can be anywhere near comfortable letting us stay with them for the night. We misjudged the openness people would have to other ideas of how to live. We have found that telling others we are Buddhists usually ends any communication we may have had with them.

We have also met amazing generosity on our path. The first day we went on alms-round, a woman ushered us into a grocery store and told us to help ourselves to whatever we wanted. While we were there, she started talking about how bad it was that the government was outlawing prayer in school and not allowing the Ten Commandments to be displayed at the courthouses. The few others in the store nodded in agreement with her. People who are in the minority in my part of the country are in the majority here.

For the first three days we kept to the river. When we could not find a place to sleep there was always the river side of the levee. Our most recent campsite was in the shade of bald cypress trees, whose root systems snake above the soil for a few feet before diving into the earth. Bare vines hung down in the soft light. Snowy egrets, crows, and scores of red-winged blackbirds sang all around us. And just a little way away, beyond the willow bushes, was the endless grind of industry. Trash littered every square foot of the ground on this side of the

levee. Every time the river floods it rises up against the levee and deposits whatever it has carried downstream, which is quite a lot. And so we camped among tires and toilets, broken boats and bottles.

Finally, we decided to leave the river because the woody spaces between industrial areas were growing smaller and smaller the further upstream we ventured. We did not know when we walked onto Highway 61 that the highway itself was the only dry ground for the next 15 miles. By the time we made it to a place where we could stop, we had walked 22 miles; we were out of water and completely exhausted. Fortunately, we had a contact in Baton Rouge whom we were able to visit a day early. My feet had blistered pretty badly and I would not have been able to walk another day.

We have decided to skip the next section of Louisiana and a bit of Mississippi, because swamps would force us close to the levee, and industry is densely packed along the levee north of Baton Rouge. We have been offered a ride up to Natchez, Mississippi, where the Natchez Trace, a historic trading route, begins. It is now a national park, and we

*We camped among tires and toilets,
broken boats and bottles.*

plan to follow the old trail north to Jackson, where we have contacts. At that point we will evaluate the walk again and see how we want to proceed. We do not know if rural Mississippi will be open to helping a couple of strange strangers.

Tudong is important for spiritual growth. Qualities of the mind develop when you live in this way that are foundations on which to build a strong meditation practice. Wherever we walk, if we take our preferences with us, we will suffer. When I am mindful of the Buddha's teaching, whatever we encounter rolls away again and a sense of ease pervades, but when I lose sight of the teaching, the walk becomes very difficult. We also have to be both resourceful and persistent, just as in dealing with the mind. With resourcefulness we can adapt to the changing conditions of the pilgrimage, and persistence enables us to push ahead when we really don't want to go any further. Wisdom must be present as well, because any qualities of the mind, if we hold onto them, can become defilements and get us into a lot of trouble.

Though we both knew that this walk would be difficult, we felt a sense of romance about it ahead of time, as with any adventure. That sense of romance must be present to undertake what we have undertaken, and it is the first thing to fall away.

Further Down the Road: 40 Days into the Walk

I am sitting in Ven. Jotipalo's parents' home in Crawfordsville, Indiana. Spring is frosting the trees and the sun is low in the sky. The light looks very yellow. We did not expect to be here. We should be walking into southern Missouri right now.

A little over two weeks ago we became ill. Ven. Jotipalo had no energy and I had fevers that would course through my body in the afternoons and evenings. After a week of these symptoms we sought medical attention and were diagnosed with respiratory infections and given antibiotics. But the antibiotics did little except to exacerbate our symptoms and leave us without an appetite. There was a doctor in Lafayette, Indiana, who had offered medical assistance while we were on this walk. We telephoned him the day we were supposed to leave Memphis and he told us not to walk. Instead, we caught a train to Indiana to see him. After a blood test we were diagnosed with mononucleosis. So now we are looking for a monastery to house us while we recover. When we are well, we plan to continue walking.

After the first week of walking I was sure that we would have to go to the bank and begin withdrawing money in order for this walk to work. Even with the train tickets, the first doctor's visit, the medication,^o and other expenses, we have yet to touch any money that was donated before the walk began. We started with \$150 in cash and right now we have close to \$100. Support has come from complete strangers, close friends, and those whom we now consider friends, but who were just a name on a piece of paper a few weeks ago. Generosity meets us with every step.

When one lives on the generosity of others, a humble confidence arises. The smallest gift inspires a deep sense of gratitude. I thought I knew the world before I went on this walk. I thought it was a half-hearted world, a world where good things were taken for granted and bad things were overemphasized. I am not blind to the atrocities that occur, but the world I see now is a world of generosity and kindness. I view the world not from a position of taking what I need from it, but from a position of humbly receiving that which I need, and being grateful for everything. That is a beautiful world.

Something interesting happens when your spiritual practice is made possible through the gifts of others. The practice ceases to be "my" practice and becomes "our" practice. Though I am the one sitting and walking, I am not doing it just for myself but for all those who have been generous toward me. And the practice does not stop there; it extends to all beings. When you practice for the benefit of all, you stand on a bastion of goodwill.

This walk is having an effect on the world. We

have received e-mail from people all over the country and from a couple of people overseas, as well as from people we have just met, in response to the online journal we keep, saying how inspiring our walk is to them and how important it is that we are walking. We are dedicating the merit of this walk to world peace. We often chant the "Sharing of Blessings," asking that any good that comes to us from this walk be shared with the entire world.

And now Ven. Jotipalo and I have mono. We could be very upset by our poor health and think that we have failed to do what we set out to do. But this is no failure, it is just another turn in the road. Even this illness is a gift. It allows us to study the mind's reaction to illness, it allows us some time to process our experiences, and it strengthens our sitting practice. We hope to be well within the next month, but that is beyond our control. We will be well when we are well, and when we are well we hope to continue walking.

"Once a journey is designed, equipped and put into process, a new factor takes over. A trip, a safari, an exploration, is an entity, different from all other journeys. It has personality, temperament, individuality, uniqueness. A journey is a person in itself; no two are alike. And all plans, safeguards, policing, and coercion are fruitless. We find after years of struggle that we do not take a trip; a trip takes us.... In this a journey is like a marriage. The certain way to be wrong is to think you control it."

—*Travels with Charley*, by John Steinbeck ❖

Austin Stewart is 27 years old. He received his BFA from the Art Institute of Chicago, and he resides in Gunnison, Colorado. When not wandering he is gainfully employed at a deli and also works a variety of odd jobs.

Venerable Jotipalo Bhikkhu and Austin are keeping an online journal at www.abhayagiri.org. Austin hopes to compile the journals into a book after the walk is finished.

Prison Dharma, continued from page 15:

hearts out, sharing emotions, thoughts, pain, and wisdom. We put aside the tension and affectation that pervades prison life and we got to know each other. It was the supportive community that we all desperately needed.

In October of 2001 I became a member of the Interfaith Order of Communion and Community, founded by Bo and Sita Lozoff of the Human Kindness foundation and the Prison Ashram Project. Joining the order required that I vow to abstain from selfish violence, pornography, intoxicants, mind-numbing behavior, and religious superiority. The order also required that I complete at least one hour of formal spiritual practice ("communion") each

day, including 30 minutes of sitting meditation, and that I regularly perform some sort of service ("community"). Like the men's group, the order allowed and even called for me to find and express my own truth. Prison is a great place to practice. There is plenty of time for studying and meditating and there are nearly endless opportunities for service.

Taking Refuge

In 2002 I was unfortunately moved away from Mike and rehoused in another segment of the prison, where I formed a new men's group. It was here that I became friends with Avery. He is half Latino and half black and transcends prison's racial politics. Avery's cellmate was an Indonesian lifer named Duck who had started a Buddhist meditation service. Duck and I hit it off immediately and he joined our men's group. Soon the three of us were a trio. We ran the track, boxed, and meditated together. We read Buddhist and Taoist books and poetry aloud in the exercise yard, as if we were in a monastery rather than a maximum-security prison. I felt freer than I'd ever felt.

Then came Emile, a 25-year-old brother serving a life sentence. We started passing notes between our cells and I learned that he was a fellow writer and an avid reader. He sent me a chapter from his novel and a list of the books he possessed, a collection that surpassed my own. I was impressed. I'd go by his cell and I'd inevitably catch him in the middle of a Tai Chi routine or sitting in meditation. After Emile met Duck and Avery it became almost official: we were a foursome. Emile soon joined us all in the men's group and the Buddhist services. Eventually our warrior-monk foursome was split up, yet Emile and I found a way to keep in touch. As I continue to read of his experience with the dharma, his sincerity moves me to compassion. I cannot tell any longer whether I am his elder or he is mine.

Emile eventually told his family that he was Buddhist. I have always shied away from traditional classifications for fear that I would lose the freedom and spontaneity of my practice. Duck and Avery and I never declared ourselves Buddhists; we just practiced. We took refuge in the teachings, our practice, and each other. But Emile's admission opened up something for me: I knew that I could be a Buddhist without erecting any new borders. I could even move closer to humanity because there is nothing exclusive about the Buddha's teaching. Conceptual borders simply dissolve under truth. As Emile and I exchange our dharma notes, and as I shed a few tears for our little sangha, I have the courage to call myself a Buddhist too. ❖

William Tyler is 30 years old and is an inmate at Calipatria State Prison in California.

Going Home with Thich Nhat Hanh

by Alissa Fleet

T*hây is going back to Vietnam!* The news traveled fast. The Vietnamese government and Plum Village, Thich Nhat Hanh's community in France, had finally reached an agreement that would allow him to return to his native country. "Don't believe it," someone told me, a grandfatherly friend who is Vietnamese and weary from his dealings with the Vietnamese government. "You can't trust the Communists. First they say one thing, then they change for no reason. You can believe it the day *Thây* lands in Vietnam."

Many of us made quick arrangements to be in Hanoi by January 10th, the day when *Thây*, as Thich Nhat Hanh is affectionately called by his students, would finally set foot in Vietnam after 40 years of exile. Many more were following the story, including, we were warned, the Vietnamese secret police. In a letter addressed to the hundreds of Western laypeople who would be traveling with the delegation over the three-month period, *Thây* prepared us: "All of us will be closely observed, especially by secret agents, who will be able to appreciate our wholesome energy and certainly will profit from it."

The rumor mill filled in what was left unsaid: that Vietnam used to be one of the most heavily policed states in the world, that as a general rule the government there does not trust religious groups, that even today they are holding monks in prison and under house arrest, and that they would probably have a dossier on each one of us. Wanting to be good ambassadors, we translated this to mean: be careful about what you say in public, and whatever you do, don't say anything about the government.

It didn't seem like it would be much of a problem. After all, we were not there to stir up trouble. We were there on a pilgrimage, to accompany *Thây* back home, and to hear for ourselves the echoes of Vietnam that are embodied in the practice of mindfulness. *Thây* teaches us to dwell happily in the present moment, even when your country is at war, and even if you call for an end to the bombing and are locked out of your country for decades. His is a practice that only truly took hold after it was reinterpreted for the beginner's mind of the West. For most Vietnamese this would be their first encounter with *Thây's* teachings—until now his books had been available only on the black market in Vietnam. What would the Vietnamese people think of *Thây's* revision of Vietnamese Buddhism?

I figured I would not be subject to the same police

scrutiny because I was not on the official delegation list. I came in on a tourist visa, and not on one of the limited-edition visas for those traveling with Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. But I did go everywhere the sangha went, and when the procession of 100 brown-robed monks and nuns, followed by nearly the same number of gray-robed laypeople, passed, I filed in at the end of the line. There was no other logical place for me to go. I was too tall and too white to blend in among all the temple ladies who were always swarming around their home temples, waiting to greet us with extravagant lunches and tea served in tiny teacups.

After a day of temple visiting, I would head back to my hotel, a different one from the official delegation's, where I imagined the secret police listened in on conversations and pawed through camera gear left in the rooms during off hours. On my way home I would often stop at an Internet café. I was keeping a blog about the trip. Within the first few days of posting it, people from all over the world responded, eager to hear as much about the trip as I could tell them. From the widespread response, I assumed that the secret agents were probably keeping an eye on my blog too.

The first time we visited a temple in the north that had an altar to Ho Chi Minh—known to many as Uncle Ho—and saw his bust decorated like a Buddha statue with chrysanthemum flowers and candles, I nudged one of my American friends, but I didn't tell about it on my blog. Nor did I tell about the first time the sangha stood up on a stage adorned with a huge Uncle Ho statue, a hammer and sickle, and the Communist party flag. The talk began with 15 minutes of chanting "Namo Avalokitesvara," the most angelic of chants in the Plum Village repertoire. At retreats, this chant regularly brings tears to people's eyes as they call on the bodhisattva of great compassion to hear their suffering. Listening to the Plum Village monastics invoke her name and feeling the atmosphere in the room soften—here, in Hanoi, against this backdrop—was a remarkable experience. I was inspired to call up the great love in all beings, including Uncle Ho. But it didn't go on the blog. Too political. I made up my own rules of self-censorship as I went along.

Some days I would go early to the temple that *Thây's* traveling sangha would be visiting, and I would watch the procession. One afternoon I was waiting for the tour buses to arrive at a huge monastery outside of Saigon. More than a thousand monks and nuns were gathering for a five-day training in the Plum

We visited a temple in the north that had an altar to Ho Chi Minh and saw his bust decorated like a Buddha statue with chrysanthemum flowers and candles.

Village-style practice. Laypeople were allowed to attend the opening ceremony that night.

As I waited, I played with some young boys there who were curious about me as a foreigner. We didn't have any language in common, but I did know a song in Vietnamese: "Tho vao, tho ra" ("breathing in, breathing out"). They were amazed to hear Vietnamese coming out of my mouth. I sang it again for them. A small audience of nuns started gathering; they wanted to learn the song. A middle-aged man was listening, too. In English he asked: "Where you from? What's your name?" I was more interested in playing with the boys than answering his line of questions. "Are you here with Master Nhat Hanh? Where are you staying?" His questioning was starting to make me uncomfortable. I made my answers vague. I stopped looking his way. "I stay in Saigon," I said. "Which hotel?" he wanted to know. "How do you spell your name?" A polite Vietnamese person would not press like this. This must be one of the secret agents. I smiled and excused myself to go for a walk.

I walked clear to the far end of the monastery grounds and found a quiet bench. In a garden a gigantic statue of Avalokitesvara stood in a reflecting pool. Away from the crowds, I could take a break from being stared at and confide in the great bodhisattva: "Avalokitesvara, this guy is giving me the creeps."

She answered back with an attentive silence, pouring down more of her water of compassion into the reflecting pool.

I told her: "He didn't care about learning the song; he was just digging for information about me."

Just the day before, I had started taking more liberties on my blog. Ever since we moved to the south of Vietnam, Thây's dharma talks seemed to be getting more provocative. "Revolutionary," is the word I think I quoted on my blog, as in: "We need to revolutionize Buddhism in Vietnam." If the secret police were reading, they might not have appreciated my commentary, and I figured that's why they were hunting around for the person behind it. Since I was not part of the official group, I was harder to trace.

I looked across the reflecting pool and saw him again, my secret agent, sitting directly across from me. The tour buses had still not arrived yet, but I didn't like the idea of being followed around and decided to leave. As I headed toward the gate to catch a ride back to Saigon, the secret agent was right behind me. He wasn't staying for the opening ceremony either. I kept going and he followed me through the streets of Saigon until I finally lost him.

On the ride back I started taking notice of the other people riding around on motorbikes. You could see everything—what they were wearing, how many bags of groceries were dangling from the handlebars. And at the stoplights you could overhear their con-

versations. Life happens out in the open in Vietnam. On the sidewalk a cluster of men were crouched down over a checkerboard. A few blocks later people were drinking tea and slurping noodle soup, seated at plas-



Thich Nhat Hanh leading a procession from temple to temple in Hanoi
Photo by Alissa Fleet

tic tables and stools set up on the curbside. I saw how the Plum Village practice had grown out of this place, where so much of what we think of as personal life happens out in the open. Even the homes are hardly private space. The front door is often the size of a garage door that stays open all day, keeping the house cool, but also letting the whole world see in. In Vietnam, when you cultivate peace in your inner life and in your day-to-day habits, that peace is immediately passed on to the outside world through the natural rhythm of life. Thây teaches us to start with peace in ourselves. In an atmosphere of repression, it might not be safe to speak out directly, but no one can police your mind. They cannot jail you for breathing in as you step with your left foot—"I have arrived"—and breathing out with your right foot—"I am home."

I took my time going back to my hotel that night. And when I didn't think I was being followed anymore, I went back to the Internet café to edit my latest blog posting.

"It seems to me that growing up in Vietnam, you are fed a line about what it takes to be a good citizen. But once you get out into the world, you find that the moral lessons you've studied don't actually serve you."

After a day of temple visiting, I would head back to my hotel, where I imagined the secret police listened in on conversations and pawed through camera gear left in the rooms.

They probably didn't like that one. I deleted it. I found myself trying to paint a picture of a Buddhist practice that was not threatening, that was simply about sitting and breathing and smiling sweetly. I was trying to erase any trace of the fact that this Buddhist practice is not just about awakening myself but about awakening society, in effect laying the inner groundwork needed for real social change.

I lay low for the next few days. I went to the beach. On my blog I went back to talking about the yellow *mai* blossoms that were blooming. I resurfaced again at a dharma talk given at a social science school back in Saigon. Again, the sangha shared the stage with a statue of Uncle Ho in front of a huge red curtain with a hammer, sickle, and glimmering gold stars.

As I was making my way through the auditorium, I saw my secret agent from the other day. He gave me a little "Hi!-Remember-me?" wave from a few rows away. My stomach dropped. This guy was showing up everywhere. I turned away.

Thây talked about the sangha he had built up in the West and how its roots are really in Vietnam. He talked about how the Western sangha is made up of people from many different religious traditions and that when Christians and Jews come to the practice he encourages them to go back to their root tradition. They can use the practice to look into their traditions

more deeply. Then he added, "Politicians, they need to practice, too." I sat up in my seat. Thây was not being subtle anymore. He was addressing politicians directly. He talked about how the great kings of Vietnam relied on Buddhist practice to keep out invaders from China. He had everyone's attention. "I hope the politicians of Vietnam will not wait until they are old to study Buddhism."

While I had been going out of my way to avoid talking politics or politicians, Thây was driving straight toward them. He talked about the retreat held at Plum Village last year for members of the U.S. Congress and their families, and how the Parliament of India had been integrating mindfulness practices into its meetings. By the time Thây was done, it seemed perfectly logical and appropriate for Vietnamese political leaders to go on retreat at Plum Village.

There were a few minutes at the end of the talk for questions. People asked about abortion, about Iraq, and about 9/11. The last question came from a woman who had been listening closely; her voice was loud and urgent. She asked, "I'm a member of the Communist Party and I want to know, if I go for refuge and take the five precepts, can I still be in the Party?"

There was a hard silence in the room. The talk had already gone overtime and the moderator was eager to close the session. It looked like Thây was not going to get a chance to answer and that we would be left with the tension of this unanswered question. But then, as the moderator was shuffling his papers to find his closing remarks, Thây found a short pause to answer, "Once you go for refuge, it will make you love the Party even more."


I felt the room sigh with relief, and in that moment, I felt myself become free. He answered with such clarity and with such conviction. He explained to us that there really is no split between Buddhism and Communism, that the two can coexist harmoniously.

On my way out I passed by my secret agent again, this time knowing that I had nothing left to hide, nothing to fear. I walked out of the hall smiling from ear to ear as if I were in love, a deep kind of love. It was the kind of love that does not discriminate, that does not take sides—communist-noncommunist, north-south, east-west—but instead knows how to embrace. It is the kind of love you have when you go back to your ancestral village for the first time in decades. You don't go alone. You take along a few hundred of your friends so they know the joy of touching your roots, too, which, in the end, are the same as theirs. ❖


Alissa Fleet is a former winner of Turning Wheel's Young Writer's Award. She writes, does Web design, and sits with the Morning Light Sangha in Berkeley, California.

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Borderlands

by Caitríona Reed

If I begin by declaring that I am a transsexual woman will I get your attention? What must I then write to sustain it? I am as uncomfortable with the assumption that I have particular viewpoints based on my gender identity as I would be if the assumption were made that I have particular viewpoints based on my class and race. It presumes that I have led an entirely unexamined life and have become altogether lost within the narrow confines of queer identity. A friend and fellow dharma teacher made the assumption that my students would now be made up principally of other trans folk. It is as if someone expressed the assumption to my friend, who is a psychotherapist, and who happens to be African American, that his clients must be mostly other African Americans.

I live where chaparral forest meets the rolling grassland so characteristic of inland California. Before I came here I lived beside the Pacific Ocean. I learned that in transition zones such as these, there is a variety among the animals and plants that does not exist where the environment is singular. But singular environments are rare. Monocultures do not exist in the nonhuman world, and completely closed ecosystems are likely to be unstable and vulnerable. Transition zones—those places where differences in topography, soil, climate, and flora meet each other—proliferate. Mountain ranges, river valleys, and deserts blend into each other by degrees—tide pools, clearings at the edges of forests, slopes where trees gradually give way to grasslands. Creatures living where habitats meet take advantage of the diversity. They shelter in one and feed in another. Even when there appears to be a fixed border, its fixity is contradicted by those who cross it.

Given the weight of observable evidence in the world at large, I marvel at how the dominant culture has come to insist on boundaries with such vigor. I am thinking not only of forests and deserts but of all the ways in which race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and religion are packaged and defined. Perhaps it is the enduring legacy of classical culture obsessed with hierarchies and fixed order; perhaps this is just what we do as primates to protect the fragile ground of imaginary tribal identity.

During retreats at Manzanita Village we often speak of the land here and reflect on transition zones as fertile places, places of unpredictability and promise. This becomes a powerful guiding metaphor, suggesting that we can trust transitions and ambiguities in our own lives. So, too, through our practice of the

Buddhadharma, we come to see samsara and nirvana (conditioned reality and liberation)—understood initially as oppositional—as mutually interdependent.

In her book *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa explores “the border” as a place to inhabit rather than merely a line of demarcation. Her experience as a *tejana*—not fully Indian, nor fully Mexican, nor gringa, even though she has spent her life in the U.S.—was of coming to wholeness through accepting a multiplicity of intersecting identities.

If others always experience you as being either one thing or another when you are in fact both, you develop a tolerance for ambiguity. If we are willing to tolerate ambiguity, we challenge the assumptions of the dominant culture, which insists that everything be definable. A tolerance for ambiguity also challenges those who stand outside the dominant culture and oppose it (or survive it) by means of a politics of identity. When we inhabit the border we stand both inside and outside. We are nomads who belong everywhere or nowhere. Our survival depends on our tolerance for ambiguity. And there is always a part of us that remains hidden.

* * *

As a “woman of transgendered experience,” I was born and socialized as a man. I am now functionally, socially (and legally), a woman. I have friends and allies who have said that as a transsexual I must have somehow always been a woman. There are others, no doubt, who would say that I am a mutilated man. All of them assume that I must be one or the other. They are uncomfortable with having the immutability of gender challenged.

Changing your sex can be a serious inconvenience, a major interruption to your life. For the vast majority of transgendered people I know, the business of dancing between genders or transitioning from one gender identity to another is fraught with uncertainty, fear, shame, economic deprivation, physical danger, and loneliness. Yet I, like other trans people I know, am filled with gratitude. My life seems to be my own in ways that it was not when I lived as a man.

At one time I was eager to disclose the adventure of my transition. It was a way to make myself known after hiding for so long. It was also a means of self-preservation. Some people distanced themselves from me, others celebrated with me, and others turned me into a kind of token, the official transsexual dharma teacher.

Changing your sex can be a serious inconvenience, a major interruption to your life.

**When I wake
up in the
morning, what
sex I happen
to be is not
usually on
my mind.**

As a teacher I began to use the experience of my journey from repression to openness as an encouragement for others to trust their instincts, to take risks, to find their own authenticity. It had very little to do with identity politics, or with creating a safe space for others merely because they happened to be transsexual.

I always assume, perhaps a little idealistically, that everyone is looking to live with authenticity, that everyone is looking to make their lives and their bodies their own. Whoever we are, we all have choices we must make, and transitions we must undertake.

I am still not altogether clear what it means to be either a man or a woman. Once it seemed to be about external expression, the theater of illusion, and how I presented myself in the world. Then, as my body changed through the use of hormones and surgery, my focus was more on the body itself. Now that I have learned to question the classifications by which the bodies and lives of both women and men are oppressed and colonized, it is harder for me to distinguish between the societal and subjective aspects of the experience of gender. I have friends who appear to be men or women but whose inner identity contradicts their outer presentation. I have friends who reject binary identity altogether. I try to accept people for who they say they are.

When I wake up in the morning, what sex I happen to be is not usually on my mind, though if I catch a glimpse of my naked body in the mirror I may have a moment of, "Hmmm, so that must be me!" (Don't we all?) In the end, it may be that being tall is more important than what sex I happen to be. This is certainly the case when my shorter friends need me to change a light bulb. Am I a man with a vagina, a woman with a bizarre history, or a tall person with a long reach?

There was a time when I fluctuated between daring and fear, between the closet and all sorts of inappropriate public spaces. Against all odds, I wanted the world to give me permission to be a woman. One Sunday morning in the early 1980s, in a moment of bravado, I walked into a busy diner in a working class neighborhood in Long Beach, California, to meet a friend. As I walked the length of the restaurant, in high heels and makeup, you could have heard the famous pin drop. I was providing a moment of inadvertent theater for several dozen families out for their Sunday brunch. Perhaps it was that tall thing again, or the long legs, combined with my appalling fashion sense and flair for the dramatic. I laugh now, but at the time I was filled with an odd combination of exhilaration, shame, and fear.

These days, as a Buddhist teacher, if I speak of my transition, it is to point out that we all undergo changes as part of living. Sometimes they are difficult, life-transforming changes. Even then, certain aspects

of who we are remain the same, while other aspects are utterly transformed. To be whole, we must always take the risk of trusting what is difficult. Our lives are given to us for free, and to limit ourselves out of fear would be a sorry waste. It is not our desires that cause our suffering, as Puritans (and some Buddhists) would have it, but our attachments.

In truth, I do not need to know what it means to be either a man or a woman. Or if I do know, it is for a moment, in context—changing a tire, buying clothes, making love—and even then I welcome inconsistencies. I stand outside that binary fabrication. My experience is my own. If I feel awkward discussing such things in a Buddhist publication (or anywhere else) then perhaps my awkwardness is symptomatic of my recognition that there is general discomfort with ambiguity. People of mixed race were once reviled as the product of an unnatural union. Even in places where it is acceptable to be gay, bisexuality can still make people uncomfortable. In the current mood of fundamentalism, to admit that you are a Christian-Moslem-Buddhist is taken to mean that you are not really any of those things, that you are merely eclectic. If you are an artist who works in a bank, then you can't really be an artist, but must be a banker with a hobby. If you are transsexual your very existence may be dismissed as indecent.

Binary opposites are rarely equal. In a racist society it is safer to be white. In a heterosexist society it is safer to be straight. In a sexist society it is safer to be male. Hierarchies are implicit. Therefore to inhabit the borderland is a betrayal, an unauthorized vertical mobility in both directions that threatens the status quo. Transsexuals are beaten and murdered simply for being who they are. Of course, the same is true for all gender/sexually variant folk, people of color, and women. But those who inhabit the borderland between easily accepted definitions of identity are especially suspect. Others who inhabit more solid ground may wonder: What do they get up to? What do they know that we don't? Are they spying for unknown others?

Those who choose to inhabit borders may be liberating themselves from oppression by redefining their position within an inherently oppressive society. I see this choice as both inherently transgressive and inherently dharmic. The true test of our practice is how we negotiate the contradictions and ambiguities of living in a society that is systematically dehumanizing and violent on such a grand scale.

If I find it difficult to write about my own experience as a transsexual from a purely personal point of view, it is not that I am bashful or prudish—quite the opposite. I am not ashamed. I celebrate the erotic fact of my human embodiment and I no longer feel a need

(continued on following page)

Stewed Tomatoes

by Lin Jensen

There's a power of surprise and delight adrift in the universe that can settle on the most unlikely and difficult situation, transforming it in ways you'd never suspect.

Like all farm families, the Jensen family cultivated a large garden, particularly during the years of World War II when food was scarce. We didn't have the cash to buy much of what we ate, and without the garden we would have gone hungry. Mother always put up vegetables for the off season, stacking the pantry shelves with hundreds of Kerr mason jars, each labeled according to its contents. One of the things she always canned was stewed tomatoes. When they appeared on the table, I only had to look at them to know that I didn't like them. The plump little tomato halves looked so slimy floating in their own juices that I knew I'd throw up if I tried to swallow one of them.

You need to know that the refusal of good food was not readily tolerated at the Jensen table. We children were expected to eat what was given to us and not waste anything. Whenever stewed tomatoes were included, I'd load my plate with carrots, beets, spinach, string beans, anything but tomatoes, in an effort to show my good will and gratitude. In this way I had somehow managed to get by for years without ever tasting a single bite of stewed tomato. And yet whenever the tomatoes came out of the pantry, there was tension in the air over my refusal of them. Once or twice Mother had spooned some tomatoes onto my plate, and when it was remarked that I hadn't eaten them I'd plead my case with such an urgency that I'd be let off without a showdown. Still, no one likes to hear an ungrateful boy say that the food on his plate makes him want to gag, and the evening came when I'd run out of time. Father grabbed the serving bowl and spooned not one but two tomato halves onto my plate and told me to quit my foolishness and eat what I was given. I knew I was up against it and that I'd have to eat the dreaded things, but I was absolutely sure I'd vomit if I did. I simply couldn't bring myself to put the stuff in my mouth. But Father had no such misgivings. He came around the table and grabbed me by the neck and proceeded to stuff stewed tomatoes down my throat. I struggled, trying to keep my lips sealed against the invasion, but Father was having none of it, and he forced the spoon between my clenched teeth and shoved stewed tomato into my mouth.

I didn't vomit. I didn't even gag. I liked them! I sat there with tears of defiance streaming down my face,

and was startled to realize that the tomatoes actually tasted good. This is the sort of sneak attack that delight seems to specialize in. I'd been ambushed by a pleasure I couldn't anticipate or defend myself against. Father was looking as close to apologetic as he was ever likely to get, but I was already moving beyond the outrage of his treatment of me to the undeniable fact that I was about to ask for a second helping of stewed tomatoes.

It no longer surprises me that some sort of simple joy will shine out from places where you'd not expect to find it. It appears in its own unlikely time, like chancing upon a faded snapshot of your own likeness grinning back at you from under a stack of old bank statements in a desk drawer. ❖

The foregoing piece is excerpted, with the author's permission, from a longer essay entitled "The Duck Pen."

Lin Jensen is founder and teacher emeritus of the Chico Zen Sangha in Chico, California, where he writes and works in defense of the Earth. He is the author of Uncovering the Wisdom of the Heartmind (Quest Books, 1999) and a frequent contributor to Turning Wheel. His forthcoming book, Bad Dog! Love, Beauty, and Redemption in Dark Places, will be available from Wisdom Publications in the fall of 2005.

Borderlands, continued from page 24:

to justify myself. Nor do I wish to explain something I do not, and will never, completely understand. Like Chuang-Tzu, who, after dreaming he was a butterfly, wondered whether he was butterfly or man, I wonder: Am I a man who dreams he is a woman, or a woman who dreams she was once a man?

I have learned that wholeness is to be found in the least likely places and that we can find power even when it seems that all power has been taken from us. I have learned that we all have indigenous roots, and that we can all draw from the natural wisdom of the Earth, which is a celebration of variety and diversity. I do not speak as a Buddhist, nor as a transsexual. Thus have I learned. ❖

Caitriona Reed is cofounder of Manzanita Village, a Buddhist retreat center in Southern California, and Five Changes Foundation, a collective of activists and facilitators working for social justice. With her partner Michele Benzamin Miki she has been leading workshops and retreats for adults and young people in the U.S. and Europe for 20 years. The website for their work is www.manzanitavillage.org.

The plump little tomato halves looked so slimy floating in their own juices that I knew I'd throw up if I tried to swallow one of them.

Last Words

by Marsha Moyer

My mother, Winifred Jeanne Loudon Bailey Moyer, is getting ready to die, and I am taking care of her while she does it. She is 91. We have become friends through this, and the old mother-daughter roles have pretty much dissolved. So now we do it together, this dying, this letting go of so much that used to define us as mother or daughter. There are awkward moments we think we can't stand, but somehow one or the other of us comes up with just the right gesture or word to get through the difficulty, and like a small boat on a vast ocean, we sail forward, grateful for whatever might follow. We have learned to be in the moment with dying.

My mother has dementia, which complicates everything. She is still a strong-willed person, and does not understand why she is no longer in charge of everything. I sit often at her bedside, watching her inert body, and do my best to join whatever journeys she needs or wants to take that day, or in that moment.

My mother was a writer, although she never liked being called that. She preferred only to be known as a great householder, a mother of five children who handled life's adversities with grace, intelligence, and immense fortitude. For this, she wishes to be honored. But she was a writer. She won essay contests as a child. She became a co-editor, then editor, during World War II, of a small Indiana newspaper, the *Delphi Citizen*. Many years later, she taught high school history and literature, enriching her teaching with creative writing projects and unusual field trips. And there were her letters, overwhelming in their power, appropriateness, and wisdom for all who received them.

She stopped writing altogether a few years ago; her eyes, hands, and mind stopped working in that way. Always an editor, she kept reading, wanting to digest the news, until even that became too difficult. Her language has become increasingly scrambled and

hard to comprehend. References are out of place; metaphors, while charming, are nonsensical. My sister, brother, and I wonder where our linguistically gifted mother has gone.

But dementia does not follow any logical path. One day can be full of confusion, and the next will see the return of lucidity. My mother exhibits the common pattern of living more and more in the world of rambling disorder, punctuated by minutes or sometimes

hours of clarity. She is doing her best to express her feelings and thoughts as she lives the rest of her days in a bed, unable to participate in the activities of normal living.

And what do I do? I listen. I have learned to listen, I should say. With help from mindfulness practice and others, I have learned to listen carefully to my mother's words. I have become sensitive to the deep logic of dementia and its private symbolism. I have learned my mother's new language and I honor its intent. My patience for those who cannot speak, walk, or in some other way join in on the everydayness of our lives now rests easily inside of me.

Occasionally my mother speaks words of great beauty, but I never know when this will happen. As a result, I have taken to keeping a notebook and pen handy near her bed. It's tricky; I might be giving medicine, coaxing oatmeal into my mother's mouth, or noting her latest bowel movement, when suddenly a flow of powerful language issues forth from my mother. I grab the pen as I put tasks of the moment on hold.

The poem that follows was created in such a way. The words are simply utterances of my mother, spoken in the sequence below, amid other rambling thoughts. In an hourlong soliloquy, I heard her strong intent to express the meaning of what has happened to her. I knew it was a struggle for her to voice her suffering. So, with pen in hand, I scrawled down as many words as I could, honoring the order, honoring the vocabulary. Occasionally I repeated a word she said if



Drawing by John Yoyogi Fortes

John Yoyogi Fortes is a painter whose father had Alzheimer's. John lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The Black Earth

by Winifred Jeanne Moyer

A couple of months of air and sunshine,
Clean water, maybe...
And great-grandparents, and love, and the people you could
have loved—
And the choices you could have made—

He told me he knew I didn't love him but he knew I tried,
And he told me he appreciated deeply that I tried.
And I knew that is a good thing.

I remember unbelievable things:
Like Carl, my child...

And my parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents paying
attention to a printed sheet,
A record of a place shared by feet and tears.

And light, and paper,
Full with possibilities.

You grow up with parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents
talking about things
And you want to think about those things, but you don't.
You accept what you can accept, you know that you will hear more in
another period of your life from other grandparents,
and things will change.

And you put some things away.

Did we have a new poem break loose a few years ago?
It hovered up in the air and floated away with these creatures
who have a new way of monitoring life,
and death.

I thought we were going to have a second living period, but dark
black earth came all of a sudden. And now we are here,
Just here.

she seemed stuck, or lost in thought, in order to encourage a continuing flow of thought.

Only later did I realize that, with a little editing, I had a poem on my hands. It is my mother's poem, the creation of her own mind, and I am simply the handmaiden, the daughter who listens. ❖

On April 5, 2005, Winifred Jeanne left her body. Family members played music and visited with her in her last hours.

Jeanne lived with her husband John Moyer, their daughter Marsha, and their granddaughter Marion in Coronado, California, in the family home which has been theirs for 60

years. Marsha and Marion were the primary caregivers for Jeanne, along with some hired help and hospice workers. John, Marsha, and Marion continue to live there.

Like her mother, Marsha writes—essays, poems, letters, journals. Because of her experience with caregiving, Marsha has become a hospice volunteer and Healing Touch practitioner. Marion is an artist who brought great love and joy into her grandmother's daily life.

Marsha wishes to acknowledge the help of Thresholds, a small agency that assists in home- and family-directed funerals, for helping to bring honor and dignity to her mother's passing. Thresholds is located in Lakeside, California. See www.thresholds.us.

Everybody Has to Pay to Cross

An Interview with Yessenia Merlos-Hercules

by Susan Moon



I met Yessenia when she came into the BPF office one day to find out what we do. She comes from Hermosillo, the capital of the state of Sonora, in northern Mexico. In the course of our brief conversation, I learned that she crossed into the U.S. “illegally” eight years ago, and that it took her seven tries and several weeks to get across the border. I asked her if I could interview her for Turning Wheel, and a week later she returned to tell me her story.

We went into a quiet room and I turned on the tape recorder. Four hours later, I emerged into the ordinariness of my day, blinking and dizzy. Yessenia had transported me to the Arizona desert, narrating the particulars of her harrowing journey with feistiness and a complete absence of self-pity. Her story is not especially Buddhist, but she reminds us of the nitty-gritty of border crossing, and of the suffering inherent in the borders that human beings create. Space allows us to print only a fraction of Yessenia’s story.

She now lives in Berkeley, California. She has a visa and works as a counselor in a homeless shelter. At 26, she is the single mother of three children, ages one, seven, and eight. —SM

I didn’t ever decide to come to California. I came because I was pregnant. When I told my mom, she say, “No! Impossible!” And my family threw me away. They say, “Find the guy! He has to take responsibility for the baby.”

Yessenia did find “the guy.” She turned up at the house where he lived with his parents on the very day of his wedding to another woman. His mother learned that Yessenia was pregnant with her grandchild, and she offered to help.

She gave me \$2,000, and she say, “I have a sister in the United States, in Palo Alto, California. You better go there and have your daughter or your son over there.” And she gave me the money. It was my only option.

She gave me a phone number in Phoenix, Arizona, and she say, “Find a guy to take you across the border, and then call this phone number. This woman, Lupita, will take you in for a couple of days. You can take a shower over there, and they will get you a ticket and drive you to the airport to go to Palo Alto.”

I came to the border on a bus, three hours from my

town. I was 18 years old. I was six months pregnant, but I didn’t look pregnant. I was skinny.

When I got to Nogales, Mexico, on the border, I asked a man who was mopping the floor at the bus station where to find someone to take me across. He took me to meet a guy who had an office in his house—it’s a business. He has coyotes working for him. He has cars, a big house and everything. And he receives money from different coyotes. He asked me lots of questions about my family and where I was from. And he say, “You have money?”

I say, “Yes.”

He say, “Where you want to cross?”

I say, “You have tickets? You have different options?”

He say, “Do you want to walk, or jump the fence, or go in a car? How do you want to cross?”

I told him, “Walking, but just for five or ten minutes. Or whatever is the easy way to go to the United States.” I couldn’t tell him that I was pregnant. I was afraid that he would charge more money, or refuse to take me.

He say, “OK, you will be there tonight.”

Then he told me where to go that night to meet the guy who would take me across. He say I will have to pay this guy \$1,600. And he told me, “Remember, if the immigration catches you, you don’t know anybody. Forget this office, and forget me forever.”

I say, “OK. I will never say anything.”

I walked around looking at the U.S.–Mexico border, right there, and all the flags. I thought, “Wow! This is the border! And that is the United States!”

I was happy, because in Mexico they talk about the “American dream.” They say the first thing that comes to your eyes is money! Green, green paper! They never tell you that you have to *work* to get the money!

I went to the house where the coyote was.

He say, “You will cross with other people. You will not be alone. And all of us are immigrant people, all of us want to cross to the United States, all of us have the same goal. I am not a coyote.”

I say, “You are.”

He say, “I *was*. But from now on, I am not. If somebody asks you, I am not.”

I say, “OK, you are not—but you are.”

He was getting mad at me because I was kidding him. I try to make jokes all the time. He say, “For the last time, I am not!” Then he say, “We have to jump a small fence and we have to walk for 25 minutes. Somebody will be there waiting in a white car. And

you get into the car, and I will never see you again.”

“That’s all I have to do?” I say. “OK, let’s go! Let’s do it now!”

“Wait. We need to wait for sunset.”

So I waited in the living room, and a lot of guys were coming in and going out and using drugs over there. The coyote asked me, “You want to smoke?”

I say, “No, I don’t smoke.”

Later on, another guy came running in. He say, “They caught him!”

I say, “They caught who?”

But they didn’t answer me. They went into another room and they talked. The coyote came back and he say, “We can’t go tonight. We have to wait until tomorrow.”

The First Attempt

Early the next morning, they give me a cup of coffee, but I don’t drink coffee, so I asked them for milk. They told me I couldn’t bring food with me, or money, or weapons, just me, and clothes, and shoes to walk. I say “OK, I’m ready.” But in my panties I had \$200 and the phone number of the woman in Arizona.

When I met the people I was going to walk with, I was really happy. There was a lady with her three daughters. One was a little baby three years old—she was so cute! And the other two were 9 and 14 years old.

Altogether, there was the coyote, two more guys who were friends, the woman, her three kids, and me.

We start to walk through the desert, and the coyote say in 25 minutes we will get to a small road, and the car will be there. But what I see is only desert—it looks like no road for a couple of hours.

When we came to the fence, they hold it up and make a hole for me and the kids to slip under, but the other people were not small enough. They had to climb up and jump the fence. One of the two guys, he fall, and he broke a leg. He was screaming. So I told the coyote, “We have to go back. He need a doctor.” His leg was bleeding.

The coyote told me, “What you want to do. You want to carry him?”

I told him, “I can help, but I am skinny. I can’t carry him for 25 minutes.”

He say, “If we have to run, we cannot run with him.”

“So you are going to leave him?”

He say, “Yes.”

I say, “You are crazy—you are bad.”

The guy who hurt his leg say, “Don’t worry, go ahead. My friend will call my family.”

We started walking. I told his friend, “You are really bad! How can you leave your friend over there alone, bleeding? You better go back with him.” So he went back.

We were walking and walking. I asked the coyote, “You say 25 minutes, and it’s over 30 minutes.”

He say, “Shut up and walk.”

After three hours I asked, “Where is the road?”

Where is the car? I want to go back. I have no water. I have no food. I see only hills and desert.”

He say, “You cannot go back. How? You get lost! And I’m not going to go back with you. And all these people, they want to cross.”

So I say, “OK, if the little baby can walk, I can walk.” She was a really happy baby. But she was panting, and she lay down on the ground and say, “Mom, I want some water.” We told her, “We don’t have water.”

After about six hours, I say, “It’s too much. I have to drink some water, but we have no water! And look in front of you! It looks like I’m going to walk for days, not minutes!”

He say, “You don’t know where I’m going.”

I’m getting scared. I want to go back. I start to cry. I told him, “If I see you again in my life, I will kill you.”

He told me, “No, because I will kill you first.”

After that I was quiet for a couple of minutes. And then I told him, “You are stupid, you are bad, you are really, really bad man. Look at this poor little girl. She need to drink water.” So he start to carry the little girl.

We met a guy. He walk with us. I asked the coyote who he was. He say, “That’s not your business.”

I say, “It’s not normal to see people walking around in the desert, so I want to know who he is!”

He just say, “No, shut up.”

The guy was really high. He say to the coyote, “Wow! You have women with you!”

“Yes, but these women are not for you.”

“Come on, we can share,” he was telling the coyote. “I’ll give you something and you give me the lady.”

And the coyote asked, “Which lady do you want?”

The guy say, “I want this lady,” pointing to the one who was 14, “and this one,” pointing to me.

The coyote say, “I can’t give you the little one, because she is with her mom and her sisters, but this one,”—meaning me—“take her with you.”

I say, “Why!?”

“Because you give me stress.”

“But you cannot give me like this. You are not my father. You are nothing.”

The other guy say, “I want both of them!”

I say, “What you want from me?”

He touched me and he say, “What you think, baby?”

I say, “Don’t touch me!”

He say, “How about you, little one?” and he came close to the other one. And her mom start to cry.

The coyote, he was laughing. It was funny for him. He thought maybe the guy was kidding. But the guy say, “OK, I will not take the young one, but I will take this one,”—me.

I told him, “No, you have to kill me before you can take me.”

He say, “After I finish, I will kill you.”

I told the coyote, “He’s not kidding—he’s telling the truth.”

When I met the people I was going to walk with, I was really happy. There was a lady with her three daughters. One was a little baby three years old—she was so cute!

The coyotes have different sections of the desert, and you pay different people, depending which way you go. You have to stay in the right area.

So the coyote say, "Come on man, we have to leave. We have to continue walking. I was kidding you."

"No! Nobody kid with me!" So this guy take a knife. He say, "She's mine now."

The coyote say, "I already pay to your boss. You have to leave us." At that moment I understand that the guy in the office was the boss of everybody. The coyote say to this guy, "If you do something to us, the boss will kill you. He knows this lady, so you better leave her alone."

The guy say to me, "Give me some money! Give me something!"

I told him, "What you think? I am going to walk with money on me!?" But I give him \$100. I took the money from my panties and I give it to him. He went away then, but I start crying. I was still afraid. He could come back. He's high—he doesn't know what he is doing.

The coyote say, "No, no, no. He knows they will kill him if he does something to us, because we already pay."

"So what's his job over here?"

"He's like a police. He take care of people who didn't pay. He kill them. Everybody has to pay to cross." He explained that the coyotes have different sections of the desert, and you pay different people, depending which way you go. You have to stay in the right area. At that moment, I understand. It's like they have streets, avenues, police; they have everything over there in the desert. Guys are walking around over there asking if you pay or not.

We continued walking. I was really mad with this guy. I told him, "I hate you. You are the first person in this world that I really hate."

"Why you hate me? I'm helping you. I'm trying to cross you to the other side."

"But you were not telling the truth—my life is in danger."

"If I tell the truth nobody want to pay to cross. We have to lie. You have to understand that."

All of them say it's easy, it's easy. It took me seven times to realize it is not easy.

We walk for 24 hours. The next morning, in the sunshine, we lay down for a couple of hours. Then we wake up, and we realize that a camera was over there. I was so happy to find a camera at the top of a post. I say, "Hey guys! Look—there's a camera! Take it!"

He say, "You are so stupid! Everybody run! Everybody run!" I was looking at the camera, and saying hi to the camera. When I turned my face back, nobody was there. But I was in the U.S. Finally!

And then, a police guy was in front of me. He say "Stop! Don't run! Stop! Police!"

I say "Hi!" I was happy! I was smiling. He say "Que pasa?" I say "Nada." He say, "Where is the coyote?"

I say, "No coyote."

They found the other people anyway and put us in a van. I was happy when they caught me. I needed to drink some water, and I was thinking that it would be another

day walking and walking. I was tired; I needed to eat.

But I did not tell the police that I was happy.

They took us to the jail in Nogales, Arizona. It was full of people who had all tried to cross, too—women and men together in the same room. I was different from them. They were all people from south Mexico and from Central America. They were brown. And to them, I am white. They are poor people. They are brown and short. And on the way, when they are coming to the border, they come through Sonora, my state, for a couple of days. And the people from Sonora, they treat them really bad. So they thought that I would treat them bad, too. I told them no, my mom is dark, she is from El Salvador, and I understand, and I never treat people bad just because they are short and brown. But they were not happy I was there. I asked the police to leave me outside the cell. I sat on a bench in the hall.

After a couple of hours, a police guy drove me to the border in a van. I was lucky—the other people there had to wait for 8 to 12 hours for a van to drive them to the border. But I went in the first van that came.

He stop at the border line, on the Arizona side. He say, "There—Mexico! Here—America. Walk!" I told him, "No, I don't want Mexico, I want America."

He say, "No America for you. You are for Mexico." So I walked back to Mexico.

The Second, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Attempts

The coyote found Yessenia on the street in Nogales, and though she was reluctant to try again, he was determined to take her across the border. He was afraid she would get him in trouble if he failed. She crossed in various ways, including: hiding in a truck full of mangoes, on foot with a grandmotherly guide, and crawling on her belly under the headlights of police cars. She learned that there are really two borders, the national border and the highway checkpoint in the U.S., and that the second border is at least as hard to cross as the first.

In one of the crossings, she was happy to meet up with Manuel, the man who had hurt his leg. He was also trying again. While they were running around a checkpoint, she fell and hurt her back, and Manuel carried her to the van that was waiting for them.

Once she lost a shoe in the desert; another time she rolled down a hill covered with cactus. She had such pain in her stomach that she thought the baby was coming. One time she had to hide for a week in a garage crowded with other immigrants, and another time in a house full of drugs and garbage. One night she was the victim of an attempted rape.

Every time, she was caught somewhere on the Arizona highway and taken back to the border.

In the police station, they know that I try to cross a lot of times, and the policeman say, "Why do you keep trying? You know how many people die every day?" He say they find a lot of people dead, every day, in the border.

Each time she was caught, Yessenia said she wanted to give up trying, but it turned out that the prospective grandparents had connections with the boss of the coyotes and were putting pressure on him to get her across.

The Sixth Attempt

This time I have to walk across the desert with eight guys and one coyote. All of the guys have a big, big backpack, and they say every backpack has food and water.

The guys call each other “burro”—that means people who carry drugs. But I didn’t know that. I thought it meant only donkey. They didn’t like it when I kid with them and call them “burro,” too.

The guide say when we get where we’re going, the only one who is going to cross is me. He say, “We don’t cross. We go back.” I ask why they are coming, then, and he say just to take care of me. Nine coyotes, all for me? I was feeling like I was the queen. I say, “Wow!”

So we get to that point after walking for all one night and part of a day. The guide say he have to make a call and the next coyote will pick me up, with the backpacks, and take me in a car to Phoenix. He say, “You don’t have to walk anymore.” So he and the eight guys left.

I could see houses. I wanted something to drink, so I opened a backpack, and I saw packets and packets of white powder. I didn’t know what kind of drugs it was, but I knew it was drugs. And in another backpack was marijuana. My hands trembled. Oh, no—they use me! They use me right now! What if the police catch me now? The police *always* catch me. And if they catch me this time they charge me for all the drugs. So I run.

Now I think how lucky I was. So I run and I run, looking for water, looking for a house, looking for somebody who can help me.

Yessenia walked until she found a ride back to Mexico.

The Seventh and Final Attempt

The main boss of all the coyotes told me, “I’m going to take you across. I never did it before but I’m going to cross you.”

He was a handsome guy; he was an American guy. I told him I didn’t want to try again, because they always catch me, and I promised him I would never tell anybody about what I saw, because I didn’t want them to kill me for that. But he say he had to cross me because the grandfather say so. He say he wouldn’t put me in anybody else’s hands. I knew it wasn’t his usual job—he was the boss. He say he never had such problems crossing anybody as he had with me.

He had beautiful dogs outside his house—big dogs. We went inside and he cooked for me—meat with onions. Oh, this guy was handsome! He was really nice, that was why he convinced me to try again.

He showed me a motorcycle in his garage and say we would cross on it. I had never been on a motorcycle. It was all dusty—he hadn’t used it for a long time. I asked him about it, and he turned his face away; he was cry-

ing. He say that the last time he used it there was an accident and his son died. I felt bad for him at that moment. He didn’t act like he was the boss, like he was trying to show me his power, like the other coyotes did. He was really kind. But he was the boss of all the coyotes.

He bought me leather pants and leather jacket and a helmet, and he say, “Let’s go.” So he crossed me with the motorcycle. We drove across the border right in front of the immigration officers and they didn’t ask for any papers. He’s very gringo-looking, with blond hair. They never asked us to stop at any checkpoint.

He took me all the way to Phoenix, to Lupita’s. I stay with her for three days. She give me a small, small dress—it was my first time to wear one with no sleeves—very sexy, and she give me high heels. She fixed my hair, and did my nails. I felt so strange—it was not me! She say it was to make me look like an American.

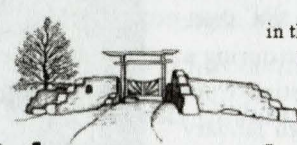
Then she paid for my airplane ticket, Phoenix to San Francisco. I still have the ticket. August 6, ’96. It was my first time in an airplane. And the great, great, great thing that I always remember was that in the Phoenix airport I saw Manuel, the guy who broke his leg. I screamed “Hi!” And Lupita told me not to speak to him because he looked Mexican. I told her if God wanted to send me back to Mexico from the airport, OK, but I have to say hi to him. Because he did a lot for me.

He was going to Chicago. He wished me good luck. I never saw him again.

I didn’t realize that death can be so close to you. You can die at any time. Death was behind me, next to me. My family teach me that I will die when I get old. But no—young people die every day over there, kids, women, all kind of people. When I was walking over there, I feel two energies, the positive and the negative. The negative was bigger, but the positive kept me going and made me able to cross the border.

An advantage that I always have—I express myself, and I don’t care who is in front of me. Other people will say that something else good for me is my color, because I am white. It’s enough for people to treat me better. I don’t care about this, but I know that they treat me better because of my color. ❖

I opened a backpack, and I saw packets and packets of white powder. I didn’t know what kind of drugs it was, but I knew it was drugs. My hands trembled. Oh, no—they use me!



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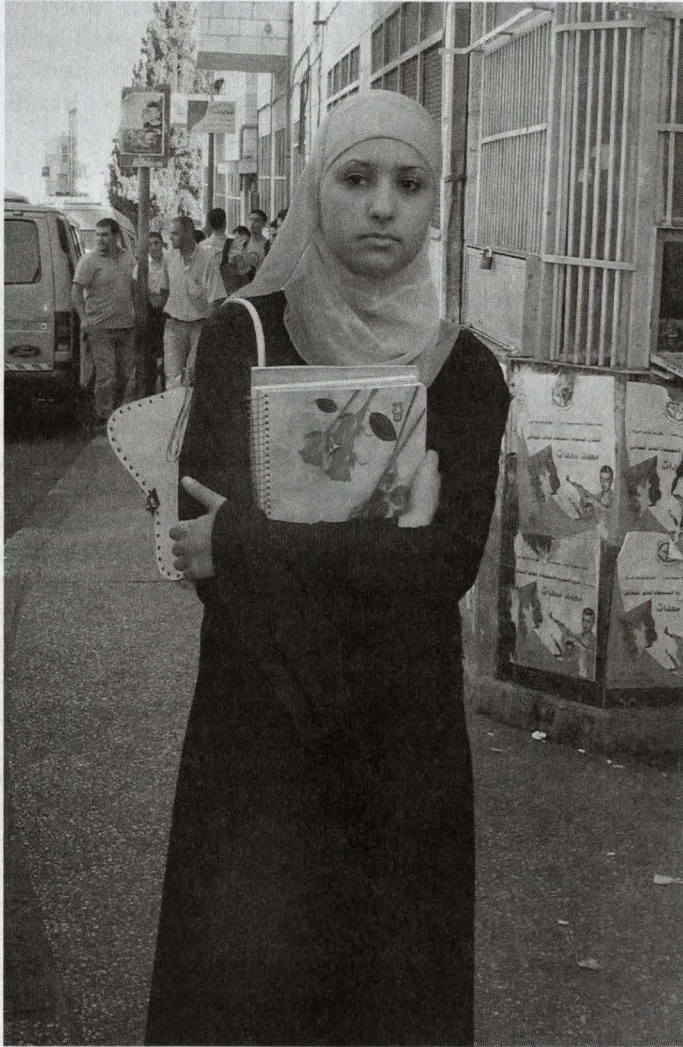
Along the Israeli-Palestinian Border

Photos by Skip Schiel

Skip Schiel lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, when he is not on the road as a peace activist. He is a participatory photographer, meaning he takes pictures while engaging in struggles for justice, peace, right treatment of the environment, and enlightenment. He took the photographs on these pages and on the cover during a journey to Israel-Palestine from September 2004 through January 2005, as part of a multiyear project examining conditions and struggles in the Levant.

For more information about Skip's work, see <http://teeksaphoto.org/Pages/PublicPresentations>.





“Where I differ from my Palestinian contemporaries and friends—and this is a very important point—is that I think it’s vitally important for Palestinians to take their message inside Israeli society, not through violent but rather through intellectual and political means. We’ve never done that; we’ve always found people willing to come to us, but we’ve never been willing to go in a revolutionary and innovative way inside Israeli society and bring our message to people directly.

“This is of the utmost importance; when many Palestinians say, ‘We don’t want “normalization” with Israelis,’ they are not realizing that it has nothing to do with normalization. It has everything to do with what Gramsci [Italian political theorist and revolutionary] says—of creating a new hegemony, a new consent, of a policy of convincing Israelis that we’re here to stay and that the only way we’re both going to survive is to survive together in some equitable way.”

—Edward Said, interviewed by Mark LeVine in *Tikkun* magazine

Opposite page

Upper left: Permit to enter Jerusalem from the West Bank.

Upper right: Hebron checkpoint in Old City.

Bottom: Border police in the synagogue section of the Ibrahimi Mosque, Hebron, talking to a visitor from the U.S. who was curious about their guns.

This page

Left: Student at Birzeit University in Palestine waiting for a flying checkpoint to clear.

Right: Israeli soldier from Australia, Old City, Hebron. His grandmother is a Quaker.

Beyond the Gates

by Jarvis Jay Masters

I was trying to distract myself from the feeling that I was in a car with three assassins—a car that made no sounds and told no tales.

One morning, a guard called down the tier. “Masters, you have a medical escort. We’ll be down in five minutes to pull you out!” “What medical escort?” I thought to myself. “Can’t be me! I’m not sick!” I couldn’t help feeling suspicious. “Wait! Hold up!” I yelled, as the guards opened the front gate of the tier. “I never asked to see a doctor!”

“Are you going or not?” was the cold response. “It’s up to you, Masters! Are you refusing?”

A few seconds passed. “Yeah, yeah, I’m going,” I answered. “Whenever you guys are ready, I’m ready.” And to myself, “Let’s just get it over with.”

Two guards appeared on the tier in front of me and ordered me to undress. I pushed my clothes through the slot and turned around, naked, in front of them. After searching through the clothes, they pushed them back to me. Then they reached through the slot and placed me in hand restraints. They called out my cell number to another guard off the tier who controlled the switch for my cell door to come open.

As I was being escorted off the tier, all my senses panned for even the slightest of unusual vibes that would tell me something about what might be happening. But there were no clues. They placed me in a “waiting cell” without saying a single word to me. I silently recited the Buddhist Red Tara mantra, to level myself out from a spiraling dive into the depths of my mind. *Om tare tam soha*.

A guard I had never seen before took off my hand restraints and handed me an orange jumpsuit to put on. It looked like a carrot costume. “What is this?” I asked the guard. “Where am I going?”

“Put it on,” he commanded. *Om tare tam soha* struggled against another mantra: *What the fuck is going on?!*

The last time I had worn a jumpsuit was more than a decade ago, during my death penalty trial. So where was I going now? I had heard rumors about transferring some death row prisoners to Pelican Bay, which is many hours north of here.

I was placed in a waist-chain—a chain that is fitted around the waist with hand restraints welded to it. It kept my hands close to my sides but allowed more movement than handcuffs.

Three guards escorted me out the front door of the Adjustment Center, the high-security section of the prison where I am housed. A small car was waiting for me, its four doors already open. A guard helped me

into the back seat, and reached in and pulled the seat-belt over my chest, securing me tightly. I’d never worn one of these chest straps before.

One guard took the driver’s seat, one took the front passenger seat, and the third got into the back seat with me. The driver spoke into the radio band and we drove off toward the back of the prison. Unfamiliar sights—the general population lower-yard, the prison industry buildings—passed by my window like a movie. I wondered how the car could move so fast without making the slightest sound! I had not been in a regular car in more than 22 years. The ride was so smooth—only by looking out my window could I tell we were moving. It felt dreamlike.

We drove along the shore of the bay, on a narrow street, uphill toward the visitors’ entrance. We were going a lot faster than I would have preferred. Shackled down in waist restraints, with a weird seat-belt across my chest, and speeding around narrow lanes made me nervous.

We went through several security gates—I could see Mount Tam right across the bay—to the front gate. We passed the prison parking lot, and there stood my unit counselor. He had just closed the trunk of his car with his briefcase in hand. I made a mental note to tell him later that I’d seen him there. I was trying to distract myself from the feeling that I was in a car with three assassins—a car that made no sounds and told no tales.

When the east security gate swung open, we drove down the street to a signal, turned left onto a ramp, and onto the freeway. I vaguely remembered this from when I had gone out to court. “So maybe,” I thought, “I could be going back to court.” But I noticed more and more things I hadn’t seen before, and I felt a sick sway inside myself—this was not the way to the Marin Civic Center.

On the freeway the sign for Eureka made my heart drop. I know that Pelican Bay Prison was in the same direction as Eureka.

“So that’s it,” I told myself. “I’m going to Pelican Bay. I’m going straight to Pelican Bay. All the way up north, far from my friends in the Bay Area.”

At that moment, the guard in the back seat next to me spoke for the first time. “So, Mr. Masters, what’s going on with you? What’s the problem with your ears?”

Seconds passed. I could hardly piece together the words. “What?” I said. “My ears?”

“Yeah, your ears,” he said. “Why are we taking you out to see a hearing specialist?”

“Whoa! Wait a minute!” I said. “Is that where I’m going? To see a hearing specialist?”

“Yeah. We have you scheduled to be at Marin General for a 9:30 appointment,” he said.

“You’re shitting me!” I said. I tried to bring my hand up to my head, to scratch my brains clean, but the chain from my waist did not reach half as high.

“Nah! I wouldn’t do that,” he answered flatly. “You have an outside appointment to be examined by a hearing specialist.”

More time passed. Then it all started to come back to me.

Nine months before, I had gone to see a doctor in an effort to get a medical slip to be able to use the special visiting phone for people with impaired hearing. I had been having serious difficulty hearing my visitors in the noncontact visiting booths. The only visiting booth with a telephone was designated for people who were “hearing impaired.” But the doctor said that he could not provide me with such a slip. For that, he said, I would need to be examined by a “hearing specialist.” But it never occurred to me that the doctor would place me on a list to be seen by one, let alone that I’d be taken all the way out of the prison to Marin General Hospital.

I felt light as a feather; I wanted to fly, to open my eyes, to look around and remember everything. I couldn’t shift gears fast enough! Now I was on an outing, a sightseeing tour of the wide world that I hadn’t seen since I was a teenager more than two decades ago. The summer sun reflected off the car window, and as I peered out, I wished everything could slow down. My eyes became the lens of a camera, snapping pictures of the cars, the trees, the houses. I could breathe the air of freedom—sweeter than anything I could remember.

I stayed glued to the window, my spirit free from the waist chain tight around my waist, free from the handcuffs, free from this conversation with the guard about my ears and the hearing specialist.

Minutes passed. We got off the freeway and came into a lot of traffic.

People of all ages were walking down the street, riding their bikes, sitting and waiting for the bus.

The traffic lights were the best. Each time we stopped, I wanted to wave to the person in the car alongside me. But they didn’t notice me—sometimes they were singing or talking to themselves.

“So Masters,” said the guard, “do you know how long this examination is going to take?”

My nose was almost pressed against the window as I focused on a shopping center. “Well,” I said, “let’s hope you guys won’t get back in time to be reassigned to more work, and let’s hope I won’t get back to my cell too soon, you know? Hell, guys,” I asked, “isn’t

there some *long* way we could take?”

Along Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. I saw many different types of cars. I once knew the make of every car on sight. But now I couldn’t tell a Chevy from a Toyota. I saw joggers, some wheeling their infants’ strollers as they jogged, while others ran with their dogs on a leash. As we drove through the midst of everything and I looked at all the people, I felt that each one shared that day in their life with me.

I was in my happiest moment whenever we came to a red light—I wanted to be there, not going any place, just waiting. Narrowing my focus, I could see

*I was in my happiest moment
whenever we came to a red light—I wanted to be there,
not going any place, just waiting.*

small things like the names of businesses on building walls. Widening my lens, I could take in the bus benches and the pair of gray pigeons walking along as if they owned the sidewalk. I saw the beauty of life inside the canvas I wanted so much to be a part of. I wondered: “Would I—*could* I—ever fit back into society again?” Every time we drove through a green signal, I felt a bit disappointed. I even wished we would find ourselves in a traffic jam for hours. I know such waiting usually frustrates people, but it would be heaven compared to San Quentin’s death row.

It didn’t take as long as I wished to get to the hospital. When the car parked in front of the lobby door and I was let out, I felt like an overgrown carrot in my orange jumpsuit. There were a lot of people, including children, seated in the lobby. When I walked in, in an orange jumpsuit, under the escort of three uniformed guards, I felt like a character out of the movie *The Silence of the Lambs*. I wasn’t sure if a smile would make things better or worse.

The people stared at my waist chains. A man was reading the *Marin Independent Journal*, and as I walked by, he lowered the newspaper. For an instant, we both looked at each other. Then the man hid his eyes behind his sunglasses. I could swear I saw the ghost of my unit counselor, the same one I had seen earlier on foot in the prison parking lot. But there was no way he could already be sitting there in the lobby.

We went down a hallway to the hearing specialist’s waiting room, and a middle-aged white woman finally came out and called my name. She explained the tests she would do and asked me if I had any questions. She acted as if she hadn’t noticed that I was a prisoner, and the guards escorting me stood down from their “this-is-a-hardened-criminal” attitude.

The testing area was a tiny space, no larger than my

prison cell, but decorated like a children's nursery. The specialist placed a pair of headphones on my head and instructed me to raise my hand whenever I heard a sound. Then she and the guards left the room.

While I was listening for beeps to come into my ears, I inadvertently said the word "sunglasses" out loud. The man reading the newspaper had been wearing sunglasses. Why would somebody sitting inside the hospital lobby read a newspaper with sunglasses on?

When my hearing test was over, the specialist said there were still many charts she needed to read over, but already she could see I had some deficiencies. She assured me that her final assessment would be forwarded to the prison.

"In a month or so?" I asked her.

"No, not even that long," she replied as I was walking out of her office into the hallway.

Speaking so comfortably to the hearing specialist gave me the courage to speak again, despite my carrot jumpsuit. At that moment I noticed a very elderly lady walking by, completely bent over her cane. She was struggling so painfully with every tiny step, I wanted to reach out. I stopped, caught her eye, and asked, "And how are you today? You look so beautiful this morning, ma'am." And she did look beautiful to me, walking like my grandmother used to walk.

She beamed up at me. Then, nearly in tears, she responded, "Oh, thank you, young man," in a voice so loud that everyone in the lobby spun around, including the hospital employees behind their desks. It was then I noticed her hearing aids; she was not aware how loud her sweet voice carried, but it was very loud. I saw some of the people in the lobby smiling at our exchange.

I knew I had been impulsive, but I just had to say something to somebody out there! Outside of San Quentin, people didn't seem to talk to each other. Was it the orange jumpsuit, the several pounds of chains around my waist, and the restraints on my hands that were to blame for the hush-hush in the lobby? Everyone kept their distance, even when they were seated right next to each other. Nobody seemed to acknowledge that someone else was sitting beside them. Not even the kids! I would've been so hyper at their age, but they weren't saying anything, not even bouncing around in their chairs. They were just frozen stiff.

As I was escorted out, I again noticed the guy with the newspaper held up over his face. I couldn't help but ask, "Dickerson, is that you? Is that you Dickerson?" He didn't look up at first. I could feel a guard giving my waist chain a tiny push to say "keep moving," when the newspaper was lowered. Behind the glasses was my counselor, cracking a smile. He let the glasses slide to the tip of his nose for me to see his eyes.

"Man, Dickerson," I said. "I thought that was you!"

What in the world you doin' here?"

My counselor still didn't say a word, but he gestured to the escorting guards that it was OK that I had stopped walking. He looked down, folded the newspaper, then looked up at me again, leaning back into his seat, grinning. His eyes were signaling me to take a look around and see for myself why he was there. In the thin second it took me to scan the lobby, I saw faces here and there—even behind the front office desk of the lobby—that I had seen before, faces of both men and women. They were all prison guards! They were dressed in plainclothes, scattered all over the lobby.

"Holy shit!" I said to myself. I couldn't believe my eyes. "Where did they all come from?" My counselor got up from his seat. Quietly, through subtle hand movements, and without giving the appearance of doing anything, he directed all the plainclothes guards to begin their exits from the lobby, with some in front of me and others behind. There were even more plainclothes guards stationed outside in the parking lot.

When my escorts put me in the back seat of the car, I saw from the window the plainclothesmen searching the bushes around the parking lot. Then state cars pulled up alongside them, picking them up one by one. I turned to the guard beside me. "Man, what is all this secret service stuff? Some sort of presidential escort you guys got goin' on?"

"Well, Mr. Masters," he answered, "you're a very important person to the state of California. We don't want to lose you."

"Aw, come on! Give me a break!" I laughed.

"No, seriously," the guard responded. "We know your supporters want you out of San Quentin. We just tryin' to make sure it doesn't happen today!"

"You thought my supporters would be here at the hospital waiting to break me out? Is that why you were all hush-hush about where I was going?" I asked.

"All I can tell you," he said, "is we'd rather be safe than sorry! Whenever we transport a prisoner outside the prison, and especially a condemned prisoner, every precaution is taken to ensure that we get you where you are going safely, and that we return you back safely."

As we drove out of the parking lot, I saw a state car in front of us and two others directly behind us, all carrying plainclothes guards. "Tell me something," I asked the guard. "Have all these other cars been with us ever since we left San Quentin? Because I know I saw Dickerson walking out of the prison parking lot and I've been wondering how he could have been sittin' in the lobby when we arrived."

"You're goin' to have to ask Dickerson that," he answered.

I hoped the ride would be slowed by lots of red

Was it the orange jumpsuit and the several pounds of chains around my waist that were to blame for the hush-hush in the lobby?

lights. I watched the walkers, joggers, and bicycle riders with such a smile across my face, as if this was my own walk on the boulevard. But I also noticed the lack of social interaction among people.

I saw whole groups of people waiting together to cross the street and nobody spoke or looked at one another. People sitting right next to each other on a bench waiting for the bus just looked straight ahead, straight as an arrow, as if nobody spoke the same language. They seemed robotic.

I watched two sets of parents almost side by side, pushing their babies in strollers. Only the babies tried to communicate, their tiny hands reaching through the thin air toward each other, while the parents ignored each other. Drivers in the cars alongside of us wouldn't turn their heads to look at me, though some of them seemed to be talking to themselves.

"Well, I guess folks have just become more accustomed to talkin' to themselves," I mumbled. The guard beside me started laughing. I laughed, too.

"Nah, that's not true," he said.

"Oh yes it is!" I insisted.

A minute later, a car drove up beside us, as if to prove my point. There it was again—another person talking to herself. I made double sure she didn't have a cell phone in one hand before I pointed her out to the guard. "So hey—you tryin' to say she's singin' or somethin'?"

The guard started laughing again. "Mr. Masters, how long you been in prison?"

"Doesn't matter," I said. "She *is* talking to herself. Can't you see? She has both hands on the steering wheel. And look, she is just a-laughing and giggling to herself."

"Look closely," the guard told me. "Look very closely, Masters. There's a pair of thin headphones on top of her head. You see 'em? And right in front of her mouth look real closely. You see that little piece of equipment?"

"Yeah, I see it. You're talkin' about that curled piece of wire in front of her mouth, right?"

"Yeah, that's it," said the guard. "That's a telephone.

That's an actual cell phone."

"Nah, you kidding me," I said, embarrassed. "You mean to tell me all the people I thought were talking to themselves had on somethin' like that?"

"Mr. Masters, this is Marin County," explained the guard driving the car. "If it's out there, you'll see it first in this county!"

"Well, I guess you learn somethin' new every day, huh?" I mused, wanting to scratch my head for some reason. At that moment I realized just how distant San

Quentin was from this whole society, like an island unto itself, even though it sat right in the center of the Bay Area. And I had been confined behind its high walls for more than two decades. On this day, I had seen a world I had not known before.

Over the years I have tried hard to remember things as they were in society, to hold on to something that I could reach back to and reflect upon, so that I might never feel severed from the world I wished to return to. Now, my memories started to shred. The impermanent nature of all things left me nothing to hold on to. Everything had changed. Then I asked myself: "Hey! How would you like it if things stayed the same? Especially if that included you?" When the castlelike shape of San Quentin suddenly came into view, I had so much to think about, so much to reflect upon.

How fortunate I had been compared to all the other condemned inmates on the dreadful first tier of the Adjustment Center. To have actually gone outside the prison, even for a couple of hours—and in order to have my ears tested! When the cell door slammed shut behind me, I thought I could hear more clearly the noise of the tier. Then I realized that what I was really hearing was the voice of my own heart telling me that I did not belong here, not on this first tier, not on any tier, not in San Quentin or in any other prison! I heard the voice of my own longing to be physically free again. ♦

Jarvis Jay Masters is an African American on California's death row. His book, Finding Freedom: Writings from Death Row (Padma), can be ordered from the BPF office for \$15.

The Economy of Days by Michael Glaser

To want, to have, to do—
the verbs I live
in perpetual unrest.

How difficult to be—
to embrace the homely
details of my days

to open my heart
to the flow
of this amphibious life,

to trust in the motion toward
as a fish trusts
the river at its gills,

to trust in this journey,
to swim,
to be still.

Michael S. Glaser was named Poet Laureate of Maryland in August 2004. He is professor of English at St. Mary's College of Maryland and a proud grandfather. His most recent collection of poems is Being a Father.

The Spaces Between

by Katherine Lo

I dream of my mother. In the dream, she is withering away. Bloating belly, like a hungry ghost, her throat constricted, her needs not met. Her fearful eyes meet mine and I hold onto her gaze for one last moment before she is snatched away, before I wake up to sunlight streaming into my bedroom.

Despite my coming to my senses, the disquiet lingers from the distorted memory of my mother. The world has tricked her into believing that she is good for nothing beyond the duties of a housewife. How do I tell her this? Would breaking free of her bondage entail compromising the family, which she sees as her greatest duty? How do families exist on the backs of their mothers? How do we exist on the back of our mother, the earth? How does history exist on the backs of those who are silenced?

Sometimes, when I look into the mirror, I see my mother's face. It is a fleeting image, and the love I feel is heartbreaking. Love is imbued with pain, always. With love comes grief, then rage. Grief at the suffering, rage at the injustice. Her face is cold glass; I touch it, and it dissolves.

One year before the war in Iraq began, I arrived at the coast of the Pacific Ocean, on a farm in Marin County. The nosebleeds began a few days after my arrival. They wouldn't stop.

"Perhaps you're carrying all our burdens, and the stress is coming out with your blood," Jessica told me one night by the fireplace in the main hall. "It's your way of cleansing yourself of the weight."

There were about 10 of us new arrivals. We had our spoken and unspoken reasons for coming to Green Gulch Farm this particular February. The first thing I noticed was how close we were to sandy cliffs and grassy knolls overlooking the ocean. The fields of fava beans and herb gardens nestled among high hills, some of them almost mountains. This scenery was the backdrop to our routine of rising before the sun to sit in the stark wooden zendo each morning.

Our chants wafted out toward unhearing beds of beets buried beneath the dark soil and salad greens wavering gently in the breeze, and dissipated before they reached the black-tailed elk in the hills.

*All my ancient twisted karma
From beginningless greed, hate, and delusion
Born through body, speech, and mind
I now fully avow.*

Having lived in the United States for the last decade, I've attended many anti-oppression workshops, but I can only remember crying in one. On a rainy afternoon in Eugene, Oregon, we talked about the relearning of lost languages. The exact moment that pulled the watery trigger involved a young Native American woman. She told us how she could only rediscover the demolished oral tradition of her cutoff heritage through audio recordings played on a tape player, her ear pressed to the speaker, trying to make out the pronunciations. Her ancestors, their speech silenced, were now preserved on lengths of tape, for playback.

When a mother tongue is cut off, what does the scar look like? Is the English that thereafter spouts out of that crippled mouth stilted, tinged with mourning?

In her book *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa describes the open wound that runs down the length of her body as a fence rod in her flesh. She finds home in the thin edge of barbed wire or the mutilated tongue, because it is nowhere else. To her, a *mestiza* consciousness means intense pain but also the breaking of paradigms.

I see this breaking of paradigms as our blood crying out for what it once knew, for what it always knew. Our face before our parents were born could be Buddha-nature, or anarchy, or the Dao, or whatever word-symbol we have forced onto something that is, in the end, wordless in its deafening proclamation.

I learned to read and write English in one weekend. It was 1987; I was a six-year-old in Hong Kong. It was a frantic rushing, a learning and unlearning all at once. As I was growing up, my parents spoke English in the shelter of our home, while Chinese was in the streets and on the television. How did I learn Chinese? How do I switch back and forth between English and Chinese, between the spoken dialects of Cantonese and Mandarin, between continents, between the past and present, between wealth and struggle, between everything, back and forth, back and forth? What is left is the sense of being alone, playing by myself in the corner of my nursery school classroom, not paying heed to the teacher and my classmates, because I didn't understand their language.

I am beginning to understand the language of blood, however.

My grandfather doesn't eat shrimp paste now. As a young man, he detested his job of crushing shrimp paste with his feet.

Here is proof that things run in my family, that burdens are carried by our genes, our blood. My brothers and I are all allergic to most kinds of seafood, especially shrimp.

When I was young, I was like a smaller version of a hungry ghost. So young, and I already wanted what I didn't have. I wanted to live in California, not Hong Kong. To me, the essence of the United States was the smell of laundry detergent. My small hand wrapped in my mother's, we'd walk by showrooms displaying washing machines on crowded Nathan Road in Hong Kong. The smell would trigger some memory of the United States, and I'd wish that we lived there, in a suburb, where the fast-food places merit their own one-story buildings sitting alone among huge parking lots. That would never happen in Hong Kong, a city of 6 million.

It is strange that the child me thought longingly of the United States, because I am told that the baby me, only five months old the first time I left Hong Kong to visit my mother's family in the U.S., started crying and pointing back at Daddy, already a receding figure in the distance. *Daddy. Home.*

My mother recently expanded on this memory. She said that in her father's house, an old brown house in Michigan—where I perhaps first smelled the laundry detergent, where I glimpsed the wild rabbits in his garden—every night before bedtime I pointed to my grandfather's front door and cried out in garbled language. My mother knew I was saying, *I want to go home.* Which was Hong Kong, then.

In Hong Kong, my sister and I feel bad whenever we take taxicabs home and the driver sees where we live, because it is at the end of a quiet road, on a hill, far away from the hustle and bustle of concrete and traffic lights. We can't help but speculate about where

the driver lives. Taxicab drivers occupy a special place in the Hong Kong imagination. When the antigovernment and pro-democracy protests of half a million people broke out on July 1, 2003, exactly six years after England handed Hong Kong back to China, the newspapers never failed to mention how taxicab drivers were a significant percentage of the protesters. There is also a special column for them, called "Cab Chat," in the *South China Morning Post*, the main English-language daily. When my sister interned with the paper, she interviewed a 20-something taxicab driver for "Cab Chat." He picked her up at our sheltered and secluded house.

"What do you think of the Hong Kong government?" she asked him.

He turned around, elbow resting on his seat, sunglasses reflecting the light. "If the government truly cares about the people, it should do something to make things more equal between the elite and the masses."

I was born on Hong Kong soil, then a British colony, now Chinese territory. For so many years, I longed for another place to call home. Now, a decade after leaving my first home, I am ready to return. I still don't know where home is, but I am learning that we can belong to more than one place, that we can belong to the spaces between. I grieve for time lost, the time I lost desiring something I already had, but I also remember my mother's words: *It is never too late.*

Men from China traveled a long way to build the railroads in the United States.

Many of them died far from home. They never had the chance to return to China. Wild animals cross roads, their territory severed by man-made borders. Many of them are crushed by cars, in an alien land of pavement and pipelines.

A few months ago, my youngest brother saw a bobcat in our garden, behind our secluded home at



Chenée Fournier
Death Did Not Come
Acrylic on canvas

Chenée Fournier is a painter, activist, and practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism. She lives in Berkeley with her dog Astrud.

the end of the quiet road. It moved deftly, ambled through the gate from the garden to the hills, and disappeared from his sight. It is easy to forget that we live in the bobcat's habitat. We have only interrupted it with our buildings and roads and cable wires. On cable television, we can watch documentaries about bobcats. If my mother and father had known about the fluidity with which outside things passed through the television into our house, they probably would have been less enthusiastic about the machine.

"Dinner's ready!" Slamming door.

"Dinner!" Door slams.

We settle in around the circular table in our usual seats. My brother, my father, my mother, my sister, me. It is 1989, and my sister is a two-year-old toddler who still needs to be hand-fed. The news is on, as usual. When we talk too loud amongst ourselves, my father shushes us and turns up the volume with the remote control. Tonight the news is somber. My father is somber. His shushes are more fervent than normal. The People's Liberation Army has just opened fire on numerous people at the pro-democracy gathering on Tiananmen Square. Workers, students, old people, young people. We see footage of stretchers, a flurry of movement, a wailing mother. The screen flashes back to the news studio, the anchor's solemn face.

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Fifteen years later, I stand in the middle of Tiananmen Square. It is a vast expanse of gray, peopled with moving figures, tourist groups waving small flags and wearing neon-colored hats. The sky echoes the grayness. It is only a week before June 4, the 15th anniversary of the massacre. If I were here a week later, I'd be "sent back to my home province to be re-educated," according to the threat from the Chinese government. I walk to my favorite part of the square, the sculpture of a mass of larger-than-life human figures, so full of vigor that the stone seems like it's about to move at any moment—rising limbs and resolute faces, armed with idealism and youthful spirits, a movement frozen in time.

As I turn back the way I came, an old man appears in front of me. I smile at him. He smiles back. He holds out his hand, brown, weathered, offers me the line to a kite. I follow the line up and see his kite flying amid others. I shake my head politely. Had I taken it, I would have felt a lifeline to the deaths, the energy here. Already, I feel something pulsating. Some great sadness.

At the Hong Kong airport, the last time I left home, I turned around to wave good-bye to my family. My father, my mother, my brother, my sister. My youngest brother didn't come because he hates saying good-bye to me, after all these years. He was three when I first left. My father told me that my youngest brother hugs our dog as a way of hugging me. Before I left our house on the hill, there was Grandma's clasp of my hand, tears in her eyes, and my sister, lying on the black couch in our living room, crying.

"The house loses so much. Souls passing in and out. It suffers so," she said.

I am looking backward at my family, and, passport and ticket in hand, I crash into the person in front of me. My last vision as I enter the terminal is my family laughing at me. With sad eyes.

On a street corner in Washington, D.C., amid the distressed shouts of antiwar protesters, about 10 Buddhist nuns and monks are chanting quietly. Their eyes are closed and they sit cross-legged on the pavement. The reverberating chants draw me into a quiet, raw calm. I am reminded of what a friend once said: that all that will be left, in the end, are gentleness and silence.

In the end. When the borders are shattered and the fence rods are pulled out of the earth, out of our bodies. When we learn how to speak with our maimed tongues, to make peace with the scars on our bodies. When we return to the spaces between borders, to our faces before our parents were born, before we had a name, a language, a country, a homeland. ❖

Katherine Lo was born in Hong Kong. A student, writer, activist, and artist, she now lives in the United States.

Opening Doors

An Interview with Rev. Angel Kyodo-Ji Williams

by John W. Ellis IV

Reverend Angel Kyodo-Ji Williams is an activist, artist, and spiritual teacher influenced by Bernie Glassman and the Zen Buddhist tradition. She began formally studying Buddhism in 1992, and is now both a spiritual teacher and an ordained interfaith minister. In 2000, she founded UrbanPEACE, an organization that develops awareness practices for individuals and organizations. She is the author of Being Black: Zen and the Art of Living with Fearlessness and Grace (Compass Books, 2002). In 2004 she opened the New Dharma Meditation Center for Urban Peace in Emeryville, California. John W. Ellis IV talked to Angel about the New Dharma Center's mission to forge new paths in Western Buddhism.

John W. Ellis IV: You always answer the phone by saying, "Center," which sounds like a request or command. When I hear it, I sit up a little bit straighter and I feel like I should center internally.

Angel Kyodo-Ji Williams: What's held at this edifice is a center that can help you to find your own location. I hope it gives a sense of perspective, and helps you to come back to the breath, to breathe. I love multiple layers of meanings.

We talked about changing the name, but I realized that we will always be known as "the center." In a country that has lost its sense of community, we need a hub for interaction, integration, learning, love, marriage ceremonies. We have lost a lot by trying to figure everything out on our own, so we want to use our center to share what we have. We want to be a center that anchors things—a center of community, formal spiritual practice, and eating.

John: What is your mission at the New Dharma Center?

Angel: To fine-tune the ways in which the Dharma is presented. Dharma is just Dharma. It is what it is. It's truth. Truth has that paradoxical quality of being completely capital-T truth and unassailable. It's revolving and moving and dynamic for each person.

We often mistake the ways we present the Dharma for being the Dharma itself. "A finger pointing at the moon," is a Zen saying. The point is that the finger is not the moon itself. So we start talking about things in these colloquial terms and we say, "Dharma in

America..." What we are really talking about is how Dharma is presented by certain people, institutions, or organizations. That's not Dharma—it's important to make this distinction. If we don't, then somebody gets to own the presentation of the Dharma and decide how it's done or not done. So our mission is very much about figuring out how we want to present the Dharma, or what kind of finger we want to be—not what kind of moon. Buddhism in the West has largely looked like middle- to upper-middle-class white people. Essentially, everybody else is in the margin, so we want to create access. We have to make Dharma more accessible to people who have been marginalized by the mainstream presentation of it in the United States.

John: How do you create access to the Dharma for a wider range of people?

Angel: We are on the border of Berkeley, Emeryville, and Oakland, and so our center has this sort of very cool feeling of being on the margin in many ways. But there are lots of people who can't get here—or people who are not even going to know that they want to get here, which is often the case.

We have what we call a traveling circus. I go out to talk to folks about Dharma and how it applies to their lives. I recently spoke with a group of transgendered people. We have someone who practices here who we pick up because she has a physical disability. That is something that is really important to us, and she is a vibrant part of the community. We recently acquired a white male in his early 50s who sits with us. He is in the minority in many ways, because there are mostly women of color here. I think that his world has been overwhelmingly heterosexual, and there are lots of gender preferences and sexual orientations here, too.

All of us who have had that feeling that we don't quite fit in the middle of things are really good candidates for the Dharma because we've experienced some of the incongruence of life.

John: In this country, dharma practitioners are mostly white. If the Dharma is attractive to people in the margins, why aren't there more people of color practicing?

Angel: I think that many of the white Americans who participate in the Dharma see themselves as marginalized. Margins are all from the eye of the beholder. And the significant white Buddhist teachers in the United

States are all a little off, too. They're not superstars.

I also think that Dharma has come up against a very peculiar animal, which is the United States. The U.S. has an unbelievable ability to continually appropriate things, consume them, and turn everything American. I think that's what we are seeing now.

John: Is America like the Borg on *Star Trek*? "You will be assimilated. Resistance is futile."

Angel: America does that to everything it gets its hands on. I'm still trying to find the difference between American-ness and marketing. I think they are one and the same. I think we are at a juncture

We don't go knock on the door of a Thai Buddhist center and say, "You need to make a place for us because the Dharma is for everyone." We only go to white centers doing that.

where the presentation of the Dharma is beginning to mirror America and all its messiness and limitations. At the same time, people of color are beginning to see the value of the Dharma from their own perspective. Even though the presentation is starting to look like the American mainstream, something still appeals to people of color. We can taste the Dharma beyond the appearance of it, and what we taste is the truth of the teachings.

John: So what you are saying is that the destination is the same for everyone, but not everyone wants to take the same route? We can all look up and see the same mountain, but some people may want to take a different path than the one that is already trodden?

Angel: White America has carved out a path that is useful for them, from the perspective of the side of the mountain where they live and what their needs are. They want a path that has long retreats. They focus on the teachings that assuage some of their fears about who they are in the world and that help them cultivate more kindness toward themselves.

But let's say you eat nuts and I want to eat fruit. I'm looking for the mountain path that will get me fruit. Some people are tired of walking a path where they can only eat nuts, but I think we need to get beyond being mad at the people who cleared the path and planted only nuts. They eat nuts and their need is just as clear and as valid for them.

John: So there is anger in some communities about

how Buddhism has unfolded in this country? Are you saying that these people should let go of those feelings and create their own paths?

Angel: Yes, they need to create their own paths, but they may need to eat nuts while they are planting fruit trees. I'm also saying this debate does not honor the people who cut the path.

Someone told me about a mainly white practice center in the San Francisco Bay Area that they thought needed to change. I asked why. The person said, "Because the Dharma is for everyone." I agreed and said, "But that center is for them, right? The Dharma is for everyone, including them."

We get tripped up on this. White money built that center, but people of color come along and say, "They should make it a place for us!" No one really talks about this. Why should they make a place for someone else? Why? Make your own! We're no longer at the place where we can't build our own centers.

This doesn't mean it has to be exclusive, but there is something problematic about this discussion. We don't go knock on the door of a Thai Buddhist center and say, "You need to make a place for us because the Dharma is for everyone." We only go to white centers doing that. What is that about? What is playing out underneath the surface for us as people of color?

John: Maybe people feel that way because of the history of race in this country—particularly as it relates to whites and blacks. In many areas, access is still being denied—jobs, education, finance, media. So why shouldn't someone walk in the door of the local Dharma center and say, "Hey, how come this isn't set up for me? Are you denying me access again?"

Angel: If you went to a Greek Orthodox Church you wouldn't ask that! You would just say, "They made this Greek-like." Right? It's not something held in the public trust the way the media is, the way the schools are. I'm not letting white America off the hook in terms of how racism is played out in these places. I'm more interested in how we reclaim our own power as people of color and people who feel marginalized. How do we start from a place of reclaiming our own sense of empowerment in this landscape?

People of color didn't have the money to fly off to India and spend months at the feet of the guru, so that makes it different. And white folks have the money to bring these teachers over here now. They have had a certain access, but we didn't have that opportunity. So we have to find different ways, different paths. Some of that may mean that we will eat nuts for a while until we forge a new path and plant fruit along the way.

So I'm saying that to walk into a place and demand to be given nuts or fruit from the beginning is a position that disempowers us. It doesn't honor the other, and it tries to jam everything into American race discourse, and it just does not fit so easily there.

I had a conversation with someone about what it means to have teachers of color. A person can't just go read a bunch of books on the Dharma and become a Dharma teacher. Such a person may become a teacher of Buddhism, but I think that's different. She may become someone who knows Buddhism really well—someone who has a proclivity to study texts at great length, someone who can quote the classics—and she may be living a life of the highest integrity. But I don't know that that makes a true Dharma teacher, a person who has an unnamable quality that has nothing at all to do with knowledge. In fact, we *do* have Dharma teachers of color, and we don't necessarily call them that, because they might come out of some other tradition, and they might know nothing about Buddhism or Buddhist texts.

John: What do you mean?

Angel: Some people have a beeline on the truth and are able to articulate that truth so that we are constantly awakening to our nature as human beings. Those people are really Dharma teachers.

In the technical sense, Buddhism has some particularized criteria that make it distinct from other teachings: teachings around emptiness, teachings around suffering, and the truth of no-self. But there are only three or four different basic teachings. Buddhism is wide open. So even within the traditional realm of Buddhism, a lot can be taught as Dharma.

In Zen they ask, "Is transmission happening?" Transmission is so palpable, and yet completely elusive, and it exists for relatively few teachers.

We need, among people of color, teachers who hold that standard. We need people who inspire us to dig deep into the possibility of really waking up. Other people teach us things that make us feel better or that make sense of things and help us function better. There are a lot of courses that do that. But this misses the mark of the Dharma's highest offering, which is freedom and liberation from the delusions that we have about ourselves. We need teachers of color who actually emanate this quality. We need teachers who take us beyond our common way of seeing things. There are people who can just talk about it, and then there are people who embody it.

John: If teachers can transmit the spiritual essence of a lesson beyond the words they speak, why do we need a teacher of color to do that?

Angel: It's a two-way street, and some people have their fingers in their ears. It isn't just about the qualities of the teacher, it's also about the willingness of the people to receive the transmission, and that can be hindered by race dynamics. You can be transmitting the light of the sun, but if I've got my receiver off because I'm thinking, "This white man's not gonna be able to teach me anything," it's just not going to work. Our delusions are that powerful.

We want to believe that there is someone whose teachings will be able to transcend all of our stuff, and that's just naïve. Plenty of people tried to kill the Buddha. Let's just imagine for one moment that the Buddha was the most powerful person ever to walk the

We do have Dharma teachers of color, and we don't necessarily call them that, because they might come out of some other tradition, and they might know nothing about Buddhism or Buddhist texts.

face of the Earth. Shouldn't his teaching have been able to penetrate enough so that people wouldn't want to kill him? He even had to make a code and elucidate rules for the monks because his experience was not their experience, his awakening was not their awakening.

John: That scenario seems to apply to many historical figures who represent liberation and light. Why does humanity have a love-hate relationship with spiritual leaders?

Angel: We all have the ability to see clearly, but it has everything to do with choice. Our evolutionary thrust is to aspire toward our own liberation. Usually life tosses us on our tail, and then we say, "Whoa, I can hear something a little bit different now." We might even hear the Dharma from a white man and get shaken up. The Buddha is always around, but we're stuck waiting for someone who looks a certain way to come along.

Some people say we are still waiting for the savior, but I'm saying, "Fool, if the savior was standing right in front of you, you would probably say something like, 'This cat needs to cut his hair!'" ♦

The New Dharma Meditation Center for Urban Peace (www.newdharma.com) is located at 1056 60th Street in Emeryville, California. Phone: 510/547-3733.

John W. Ellis IV is a freelance writer, martial arts instructor, and member of the East Bay Church of Religious Science. He lives in Oakland with his wife and five-year-old son.

Crossing Water, Crossing Self

by Earthlyn Marselean Manuel, Ph.D.

We all have to cross, at one time or another, into an unknown territory, one that may be forbidden, or perceived as dangerous ground. We have borders in our lives that can seem as wide as oceans, or as narrow as creeks. And yet, the most difficult borders are the invisible ones within us, the ones we can't touch but can certainly feel.

I used to have a recurring dream that reflected the borders of my life. In the dream, I would start out from a desolate shore in a canoe with a black panther sitting beside me. The water would be calm and soothing, the sky open and welcoming. Various trees would cast their shadows on us. Without much effort, I would push the water gently with my oar, hoping to get to the opposite shore. I was both curious and fearful about what might be there. Yet every time I set out on the journey I would get to the middle of the river and the fear of the unknown would be so great I'd head back to the shore where I lived in solitude.

The dream would reappear the next night. Again I would attempt the same journey, only to end up turning back when I reached the middle of the river. I'd return to my home, lonely and sad. This went on for a year.

Like the dream, my waking life was an ongoing struggle to cross the border between suffering and liberation. I often felt the pain of isolation, as though I did not belong to the world because I am black and queer. At the time I was having these dreams an experience brought this feeling of separation alive for me. One afternoon, I noticed a white woman and her blond-haired little girl as they walked toward me down a hill. The little girl skipped blissfully down the pavement, enjoying the sun. When the mother became aware of my approach, she called her daughter to come back to her. The child stopped and the mother grabbed her up into her arms and ran across the street.

I do not know for sure what was in the woman's mind, but it seemed as if she was trying to save her child from me. My African features, dark skin, and sturdy walk were most likely the things the mother noticed first about me. By acting on her perception of me, she literally created a truth around my difference. To her, I was most likely someone to fear. I felt sad when the mother stopped her skipping child—yet her action robbed all three of us of this beautiful display of happiness. And in that moment, I wanted to let her know that she was making a mistake. Before they ran

off, I wanted to say, "Hello," and let them know that I, too, was enjoying the sun.

In *The Heart of the Buddha's Teachings*, Thich Nhat Hanh writes, "We are on the shore of suffering, anger, and depression, and we want to cross over to the shore of well-being." On that hill with the skipping child, my well-being was dependent upon my ability to continue up the hill despite my sadness and what I perceived to be the mother's fear. I could not wait for my feelings to change about her or myself. I had to walk forward.

And that was just what I had to do to reach the other side of the shore in my dream. I had to continue across the water through my fear, pain, and sadness. I could not wait for a day in which I would feel courageous and happy. The suffering was so great I had no other choice but to leave with it.

Again I ventured out in my canoe, leaving the island of suffering in which I had lived most of my life. With each stroke of the oar, I felt as though I was leaving all that I was, all that I clung to as my existence. The panther came along and like a good dharma sister, had no judgment about whether I made it across or not. I remember reaching the middle of the river and the canoe sinking a bit, but I kept breathing and pushing toward the opposite shore.

My stomach tightened the moment the canoe crossed the middle of the river. There was no turning back. I thought of Lot's wife in the Bible, who after being warned not to look back, turned into a pillar of salt when she did. I looked back, longing for the island that was behind me. The trees stood still and the panther looked forward as if to give me direction.

I finally reached the other shore. I began to smile when I saw a line of Africans dressed in their finest garb, smiling and welcoming me. I stepped out of the canoe feeling as if I were a long-lost friend of theirs. I looked back at the water. Both the panther and the canoe had disappeared. I no longer needed them. Finally, I came to the end of the line, where my mother, who had been dead for eight years, stood glowing. She reached out for me and we embraced. She said, "We've been waiting for you."

I realized then that I belonged on the unknown shore if only in the memory of my mother. It was a shore that held what I had been missing—that sense of feeling welcomed in the world. This freed me from the illusion of being alone. Looking into the African faces, I realized that I had prolonged my own suffering because I didn't *trust* myself enough to move across

**I finally reached
the other shore.**

**I saw a line
of Africans
dressed in their
finest garb,
smiling and
welcoming me.**

the middle of the river. In the end, there was no real separation between the two shores. I hadn't trusted my capacity to deal with the unknown, which left me without the well-being Thich Nhat Hanh speaks of.

Since the dream, as I practice the Buddha's teachings, I have come to experience well-being as the ability to trust in the three treasures. But this brings up questions. Do I trust Buddha, or do I see myself as a Buddha practicing the teachings? Do I trust the teachings of the Dharma? Do I trust the sangha? Some days there is so much fear and pain that I cannot find the space in my heart to take refuge in what I value. Yet, in trusting the three treasures, I begin to see that there is a larger universe to which I belong. I might return to the desolate shore, but without the suffering, as long as I can trust the existence of community despite my feelings of isolation and difference. In trusting, there is calm.

Currently, I practice such trust by participating in two sanghas: one is a people-of-color sangha and the other is a larger, predominantly white-male sangha. In traversing between the people-of-color sangha and the larger white sangha, I have been fearful that I would not be accepted where I was going and that the sangha I was leaving would consider me no longer a part of them. Yet I have allowed myself to walk right into the fear without being paralyzed by it.

And there is both conflict and joy. In the larger white sangha, eyebrows were raised when others discovered that I participated in a people-of-color sangha to which they were not invited. In the people-of-color sangha, many were concerned about my participating in the predominantly white-male sangha. They wondered if I would feel safe and if could truly benefit from it.

Yet, I entered the larger white sangha because my intentions for my practice seemed to go beyond the walls of one Zen center. Deep within me there was a drive to study, to train, and to practice as a spiritual warrior. My crossing between the two sanghas was also my response to the suffering on the planet. I had to begin by working with my own suffering and with my fear.

At the same time, I needed the people-of-color sangha. For me it was a home, a place to rejuvenate, to heal, and to express myself as a black queer woman. I needed the teachings to be relevant to my physical existence. Without such relevance or understanding about suffering from my personal life experience, it would be difficult for me to find the path that would end my suffering.

The question becomes, How can I develop a sincere relationship with all people? The answer: I practice allowing people to be who they are, having no expectations of them being anything other than what they are. I am not saying that there is no pain or suffering in the process of such allowing. To the contrary, I am often confused and disappointed with spiritual places and people.

However, I have come to realize that there is only conflict when I do not trust that what I am doing is steeped in the three treasures. There is conflict if I see the two sanghas as contradictory to one another and there is conflict if I ignore the necessity of both sanghas to fully commit to the vows of a Bodhisattva.

In both sanghas the practice of compassion is necessary. Therein lies the joy—a double scoop, so to speak, of the deepest Buddhist practice. Living in the midst of oppression, I am used to lingering, being in the middle of the water, trying to decide which way to go. I cross borders every day, going from the safety of my own home to the unknown of the outside world, which is filled with dehumanization and other illnesses of oppression. It is a daily struggle to maintain dignity.

But I believe that the intimacy of social engagement has to begin with ourselves. Crossing our own internal borders keeps us engaged with other living beings. It is difficult to work for social justice if we do not get to know the water we are crossing and how to get past ourselves. ❖

Earthlyn Marselean Manuel has walked with the Buddha's teaching for 17 years. She lives in Oakland and currently practices zazen at the San Francisco Zen Center.



Drawing by the author

Finding Original Peace at Pohakuloa and in the World

by Timothy J. Freeman

Two great volcanoes comprise most of the Big Island of Hawai'i. Mauna Loa, measured by volume, is the largest mountain in the world, and Mauna Kea, if measured from the sea floor, would rank as the tallest. Both peaks are considered sacred, the realm of the gods (*wao akua*), not just for Hawaiians but for all Polynesians.

In October of 2002, the first of a series of protests against the imminent U.S. attack against Iraq took place at the Mo'ohau Bandstand on the Hilo Bayfront. As I drove down to Hilo, I was struck by the majestic and stunning presence of Mauna Kea rising 13,792 feet above Hilo—so unusually clear on a rare cloudless morning. It was a day that was startling in its beauty even for Hawai'i, and as I listened to the various speakers call our attention to the horrors of what seemed about to take place in Iraq, my gaze drifted to the tranquil bay and the waves softly rolling down on the sands below. The contrast between the peaceful setting of Hilo Bay and the looming war in Iraq couldn't have been sharper. If it weren't for the voices of the Hawaiian rights activists—reminding us of the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian nation—I might have thought only of the profound difference between these beautiful islands and the war-torn country of Iraq. In fact, what was taking place a world away in Iraq was really not that far away at all and is, indeed, connected to what happened and is still taking place in Hawai'i. I was reminded of the “infinite extent of our relations,” as Thoreau once put it, or what in Buddhism is recognized as a feature of dependent arising: the dynamic interrelatedness of all phenomena—the interpenetration of all the jewels in Indra's net that's described in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. From this perspective, the connections between the war in Iraq, the overthrow of the Hawaiian nation, and the continuing controversy surrounding the military's presence in Hawai'i become more and more clear.

Over the past couple of years, a number of protests by both Hawaiian sovereignty activists and peace activists have focused on the military's plans to bring a Stryker Brigade to Hawai'i and to expand its training area at Pohakuloa on the Big Island. The Stryker is an eight-wheeled, 20-ton, armored combat vehicle that is designed to carry nine soldiers into battle at sustained speeds of 60 miles per hour. The Pohakuloa Training Area (PTA) is already the largest live-fire

military training area in the Pacific. It consists of approximately 109,000 acres of land that have been used for the last 60 years as a live-fire area and bombing range for an assortment of military weapons.

Pohakuloa sits between Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea. Even the army acknowledges, in its Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), that “the entirety of Mauna Kea, whose southwestern slopes form part of PTA's base, is considered holy.” Mauna Kea (White Mountain) is associated with Poli'ahu, the snow goddess of the summit, while Mauna Loa (Long Mountain), erupting as recently as 1984, is associated with Pele, the goddess of volcanic fires. The area between the two sacred mountains, considered to be a site of conflict between Poli'ahu and Pele, is called “Pohakuloa” (The Veil that Covers the Spiritual Realm). Within the PTA there are seven stone shrines and a reported 291 archeological sites.

The Stryker Brigade will consist of about 300 vehicles, which will be based on Oahu at Schofield Barracks, where there is the necessary infrastructure for maintenance. But since there is not sufficient training area on Oahu, the vehicles will periodically be brought to the Big Island and the slopes of Mauna Kea for training. They will arrive by ship at Kawaiihae Harbor and travel up to Pohakuloa via a newly constructed military road. It is partly for the construction of this access road, and also to increase the training area for the Strykers, that the military's plans include the acquisition of approximately 23,000 acres of additional land at Ke'amuku on the slopes of Mauna Kea—land currently held by the Parker Ranch Foundation Trust. In July of 2004 the army brushed aside the protests by local activists and announced its decision to bring the Stryker force to Hawai'i. Sometime in 2005 the army expects to complete the acquisition of the Ke'amuku parcel, and the first Strykers are expected to arrive by late 2006 or early 2007.

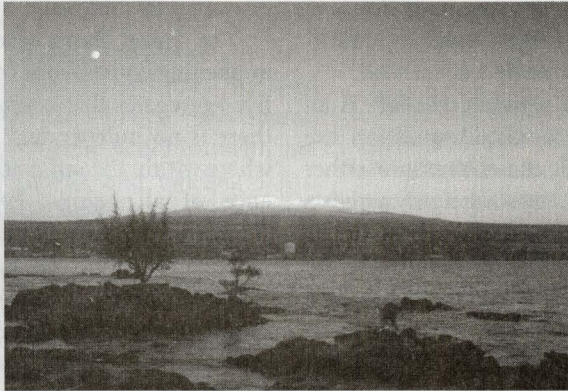
Of course, the military argues that a Stryker Brigade is necessary in Hawai'i to meet “evolving national defense requirements” for a more mobile force, one capable of responding quickly to any threat to the nation's security. The Stryker is faster and lighter than a tank, designed to move more easily in close urban terrain. In the final EIS released in the spring of 2004, the military claimed that Hawai'i not only has “the terrain and conditions most likely to be

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encountered in the Pacific Rim," it is the only available location that enables the army to meet its goal of deploying a Stryker Brigade "anywhere within the Pacific Rim within 96 hours."

By the army's own admission in the EIS, Pohakuloa is "spiritually and historically one of the most important places in Hawai'ian tradition and history.... It is difficult to describe the emotional and spiritual link that

exists between Native Hawai'ians and the natural setting. Hawai'ians generally believe that all things in nature have *mana*, or a certain spiritual power and life force. A custodial responsibility to preserve the natural setting is passed from generation to generation, and personal strength and spiritual well-being are derived from this relationship.



Because of this belief, Mauna Kea may be the most powerful and sacred natural formation in all Hawai'i."

It is on this sacred land that the military conducts its war games and plans to bring its Stryker vehicles to run roughshod over the fragile terrain. The EIS acknowledges that there will be "significant unavoidable adverse biological impacts" upon the environment at Pohakuloa. The PTA is said, by former area commander Lt. Col. Dennis Owen, to have "the highest concentration of endangered species of any Army installation in the world." The negative impacts will come from fires that result from live-fire training, as well as from off-road maneuvers by the Stryker vehicles that will adversely affect sensitive species and habitat. The army also acknowledges the significant negative impacts on air quality (caused by wind erosion in connection with the off-road maneuvers of the Strykers), soil loss and soil contamination from training activities, lead and asbestos contamination caused by the construction and demolition of buildings, and the destructive impacts on cultural, historic, and archeological resources such as the Ke'amuku Village and sacred sites such as the Pu'ukohola Heiau.

The army also proposes an increase in live-fire training. This poses a significant risk, according to the EIS, to workers and army personnel from unexploded ordnance. Peace activists Jim Albertini and Cory Harden have emphasized the danger from unexploded ordnance that already litters many former military sites in Hawai'i, as well as the military's poor record of cleaning up these sites (not to mention the high cost of doing so). Three people have been killed by leftover ordnance, and four live grenades have been found on school grounds. According to Albertini, the Big Island

has "hundreds of thousands of acres littered with unexploded ordnance from years of conventional, chemical, and biological weapons testing and training." The EIS states that "only simulated biological agents" will be used and that hazardous materials do not pose a significant impact. Harden points out, however, that both germs and nerve agents were secretly tested at Waiakea Forest Reserve in the mid-

1960s and are suspected to have been dumped at the Pohakuloa dump in 1970. A 1970 army memo from that period reports that the residue from the test pits was to be buried at the Pohakuloa dump at that time.

While the military promises to do what it can to limit the adverse impacts, it states that there

is a practical limit to mitigation measures. The bottom line is that these problems are considered acceptable by the military in order to meet its rapid-deployment goals. The thin-skinned Strykers have proven vulnerable in Iraq, however, and thus may need to be more heavily shielded. Since this would make them too heavy for air transport out of Hawai'i, questions about meeting this stated goal have arisen. This inconvenient fact, however, has not led the military to reconsider. Many activists have suspected that the whole plan to bring the Stryker force to Hawai'i was a "done deal" from the beginning—just another military contract that was not about to be challenged by any concerns about environmental, cultural, or public-health hazards.

The issue that looms large in the background of this controversy is the very presence of the U.S. military in Hawai'i. For Hawaiian sovereignty activists, the proposed expansion of the Pohakuloa Training Area is only the latest issue in a long history of U.S. military acquisitions of Hawaiian lands—going back most notably to the 1875 "Treaty of Reciprocity" that ceded control of Pearl Harbor to the U.S. Navy. The military now controls 22 percent of land in O'ahu (85,000 acres), and 4 percent of the Big Island (110,000 acres). Moreover, the proposed acquisition of another 23,000 acres of the Big Island is only about a quarter of the projected acquisition for the further development of the Pohakuloa Training Area.

It's a cruel irony that this latest land acquisition is almost the size of Kaho'olawe (28,766 acres), the "Target Isle" used for bombing practice for nearly 50 years after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The navy finally officially ceded control of Kaho'olawe on November 11, 2003, after over two decades of protests

Mauna Kea, the realm of Poli'ahu, rising above Hilo Bay

Photo by Dan O'Connor

For Hawaiian sovereignty activists, Hawai'i is an occupied country, and the lands in question are "stolen lands."

by peace and Hawaiian sovereignty activists. That campaign cost the lives of two Hawai'iian leaders, George Helm and Kimo Mitchell, who were lost at sea in 1977 in an effort to reach the island to protest the navy's occupation and bombing of it. Their deaths became an emotional turning point in the struggle for Hawaiian rights. Now, just as the navy finally cedes control of Kaho'olawe, the army seeks to take control of a similar-sized piece of land on the sacred slopes of Mauna Kea. It would be the largest military acquisition in Hawai'i since World War II.

For Hawaiian sovereignty activists, Hawai'i is an occupied country, and the lands in question are "stolen lands." Though most Americans are either unaware or couldn't care less, the sovereignty activists appear to have international law on their side. For its part, the U.S. government has already admitted to the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian nation, by issuing a formal apology by joint resolution of Congress in November of 1993 in acknowledgment of the 100th anniversary of the coup that dethroned Queen Lili'uokalani. Although the United States was the first nation to formally recognize the sovereignty of the Hawaiian nation in 1842, it was the U.S. Navy that provided the force that enabled American business interests to dethrone the queen in January of 1893. In recent years, experts in international law have called into question the legitimacy of "statehood" and American military occupation of Hawaiian lands by pointing out that there is no known record of the Hawai'iian kingdom ever relinquishing its sovereignty.

Since that cloudless Hilo day in October of 2002, the Iraq war continues to unfold in all its dreaded horror, despite unprecedented protests around the world. Out of fear and ignorance, too many Americans still cling to various delusions about this war—that it will somehow make America safer, that our troops are giving their lives in defense of "freedom," that it is a noble effort to "liberate" the Iraqi people. But because there was no real imminent threat and all peaceful means of resolving the conflict had not been exhausted, the war can only honestly be recognized as a war of aggression, which is clearly a war crime according to international law. To justify a war crime in the name of freedom and democracy is surely a disgrace to the very notions of freedom and democracy. The U.S. has the most powerful military force in the world and, unfortunately, has demonstrated a propensity to use that force far too easily and irresponsibly.

In the wake of the great Asian tsunami tragedy it should be clear just how much money is wasted in our government's crippling obsession with weapons of war. The U.S.'s contribution of \$350 million for tsunami relief amounts to less than what is spent in

two days on the war in Iraq. It is truly sobering to think of what could have been accomplished if the hundreds of billions of dollars wasted on an unnecessary war had been used instead to alleviate the suffering of millions around the world due to poverty, disease, and the ravages of war. America's beacon of freedom and democracy could shine brightly if this country could overcome its fear and put its great resources toward peace instead of war.

The Heart Sutra teaches that the bodhisattva's awakening comes from realizing the emptiness of the five aggregates that comprise the self. To realize that there is no independent existence to be found anywhere within the self is to recognize the interdependence of all beings. Perhaps the source of the American delusion is the attachment to the idea of independence. We celebrate Independence Day every year, and the notion of American "independence" is deeply rooted in the American consciousness. A false sense of independence has led this country to be disdainful of international law and to become one of the most dangerous states in the world today. To recognize our interdependence, or "interbeing," as Thich Nhat Hanh calls it, would lead the U.S. away from its current trajectory of violence and war and onto a path of mutual cooperation and peace.

To understand the message of the Heart Sutra is also to realize that the path of awakening is not about individual achievement but about what one can do for others. The path of awakening leads to the bodhisattva's path, and to engaged Buddhism. My own dharma practice may begin with counting breaths on a cushion, but it leads directly to social and political action.

I have been profoundly inspired by the example of Robert Aitken Roshi. Despite the frailty brought on by his advanced years, he continues to be a strong voice for peace. For two years, until ill health forced his return to Honolulu, he led a small group of dedicated engaged Buddhists in a public zazen demonstration every Friday afternoon at Kalakaua Park in downtown Hilo. At one peace rally in downtown Hilo, he explained that the purpose of the meditation was to demonstrate "original peace." If the U.S. could find that "original peace," the world would surely benefit. Perhaps Pohakuloa would be a good place to start. ❖

Big Island activists are continuing to hold Stop Stryker strategy meetings. For more information, contact Jim Albertini, Malu 'Aina Center For Non-violent Education & Action, P.O. Box AB, Ola'a (Kurtistown), Hawai'i 96760. Phone: 808/966-7622. Websites: <http://maluaina.pitas.com> and www.malu-aina.org and e-mail: <info@malu-aina.org>.

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Book Reviews

Dancing in the Dharma: The Life and Teachings of Ruth Denison

by Sandy Boucher

Beacon Press, 2005, \$25.95

Reviewed by Shane Snowdon

When Ruth Denison left her Hollywood home 30 years ago to begin teaching meditation, Western Buddhism raised a collective eyebrow. "We used to call her the Zsa Zsa Gabor of the Dharma," says Sharon Salzberg, another pioneering Western Buddhist. With her thick German accent, poofy hairdo, and swirling skirts, Denison arrived late to sittings, settled her Lhasa apso beside her, and encouraged students to dance freely in an era when walking meditation was considered exotic. Blending the classic instruction she had received from renowned Burmese vipassana teacher U Ba Khin with the sensory awareness practices she had learned from Charlotte Selver, Denison combined mindfulness and movement in ways that are widely admired and emulated now but drew mixed reactions then. Some found her dazzling and delightful, others outrageous and eccentric. Still others, like Sandy Boucher, experienced her as all of these—and as one of modern Buddhism's most vivid and compelling teachers.

Boucher has studied for 25 years with Denison, who, at 83, still teaches at her retreat center in California's Mojave Desert. But Boucher is no "adoring and compliant student," as her willingness to grapple with Denison's complexity indicates: "Unpredictable and contradictory, Ruth can act the high-handed Prussian general at one moment...and, at the next moment, melt your heart with her empathy for pain. She can plunge you down inside your deepest consciousness through her grasp of the truths of existence, then send you into spasms of annoyance by interrupting your concentration with verbal guidance."

Boucher's clear-eyed tenderness for her teacher is particularly evident in her painstaking description of Denison's adolescence and young womanhood in Nazi Germany. The future Buddhist was a member of the Hitler Youth, and speaks fondly of the comradeship and athleticism she enjoyed. Denison is equally open about her experiences after Germany's defeat: grinding poverty, near-starvation, and prolonged, brutal sexual victimization by Allied occupiers. How did she endure? "I always said, 'That is what we had done and we get it back.'... I have actually emptied my heart from all of it. I see it all as human."

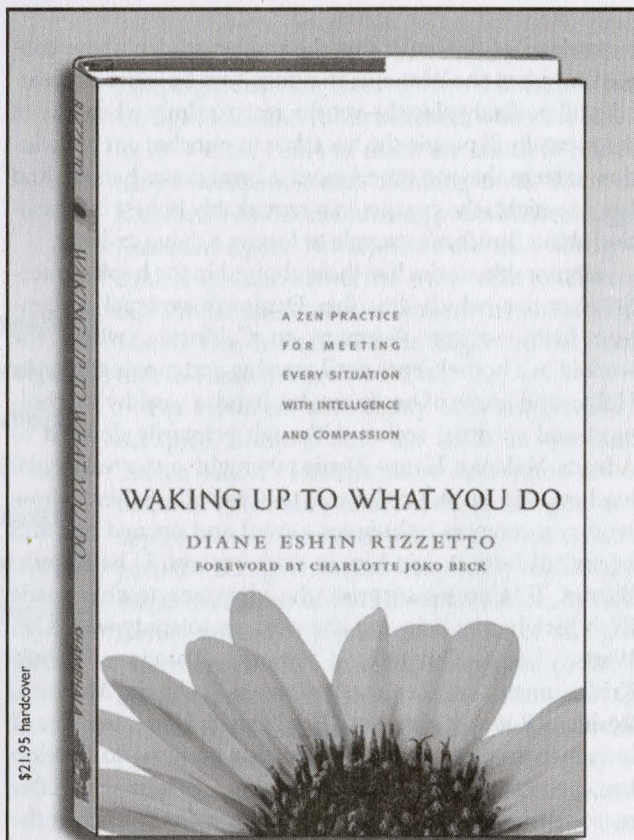
Boucher's sensitive rendering of Denison's trauma-etched postwar memories is the book's most searing passage. But other scenes also linger in the reader's mind. A fierce lover of animals, Denison prepares meatballs for the roadrunners who drop by her retreat center. Haunted by memories of hunger, she rescues vegetables from the garbage and serves them to appreciative, if unknowing, guests. Concerned with

every detail of the center that she and her students have cobbled together, she demands that furniture be moved repeatedly till perfectly placed—yet she reacts calmly when one of the mentally ill people she has taken in punches out her window screens, having experienced a breakdown herself. And late one night, she engages in a remarkably honest conversation about Boucher's struggle to forgive a dying ex-lover.

Memorable stories like these abound in the book's graceful narrative, which describes Denison's eventual emigration from postwar Germany to California, where she worked as a housekeeper until meeting and moving into the Hollywood home of her future husband, a wealthy psychologist and spiritual seeker. Although primarily devoted to Advaita Vedanta, Henry Denison sought out a variety of teachers. He introduced Ruth to Charlotte Selver, whose sensory awareness techniques moved and opened her, and he invited Ruth to join him in studying with U Ba Khin in Burma. To Henry's surprise, the vipassana teacher made Ruth his dharma heir, and she went on to study with Alan Watts, Lama Govinda, Chögyam Trungpa, U. G. Krishnamurti, and Zen masters Sasaki Roshi and Maezumi Roshi. As Boucher observes, "Her life with Henry was one of immense privilege, and she used that privilege to develop her capacities for spiritual awakening." Fifteen years after meeting him, she began accepting invitations to teach at the West's first vipassana centers. Although some students reacted to her with skepticism and hostility, others found her a breath of fresh air. Women, in particular, gravitated to her: "She acted and taught not so much from her head as from her heart and her senses; she was a mature woman, grounded in the physical world, having wide life experience. Ruth was one who could open the door of the Dharma to women, particularly to feminists and lesbians and defiant women, who responded happily to her outrageous and eccentric personality." Although Denison "did not consider herself a feminist or even understand the basic principles of feminism," she became the first female teacher to lead all-women Buddhist retreats, and Boucher, a leading writer on women and Buddhism, notes that she will be remembered as much for her groundbreaking work with women as for her innovative and holistic teachings.

Dancing in the Dharma skillfully conveys Ruth Denison's full humanity: her formidable gifts and charm and her puzzling contradictions. Her daytime dharma talks are impressively focused, her evening ones ramble annoyingly; she is as compliant with her husband as she is bossy with her students; she nurtures mentally ill people because of her breakdown, yet admonishes rape and abuse survivors simply to "get over it" despite her own painful history. But as Ajahn Chah notes in the epigraph to this riveting and deeply rewarding portrayal of a great teacher, "Perhaps it's a good thing that I'm not perfect . . . otherwise you might be looking for the Buddha outside your own mind." ♦

Shane Snowdon is book review editor of Turning Wheel.



"An excellent description of what Buddhist practice is fundamentally about. Diane Rizzetto knows this terrain extremely well. She has lived and practiced it her whole life; her methods, insights, and anecdotes invite readers to do the same. All who read this practical and substantive teaching will be greatly encouraged and inspired!"

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Hooked: Buddhist Writings on Greed, Desire, and the Urge to Consume

Edited by Stephanie Kaza

Shambhala Books, 2005, \$16.95

Reviewed by Colette DeDonato

How easy it is to get attached. The wanting mind, the feeling that we never have enough, is endemic to American culture. As dharma students, we all know this, and probably share a healthy amount of guilt about our abundance. Yet we continue to buy things we know we don't really need. Even the Dalai Lama says that when he comes to the U.S., he finds himself wanting things he didn't know existed. The Buddha's teachings were meant to offer pragmatic relief for suffering; the Buddha also recognized that if his teachings were not useful in everyday life, they were of no value.

Stephanie Kaza's salient collection of writings by Buddhist teachers on greed and consumerism is an indispensable tool for taming the wanting mind. Pragmatic, well-balanced, and shrewd, the essays penetrate our deeply ingrained drive to acquire. Pema Chödrön's offering explores *shenpa* (the Tibetan word for "hooked") through our notions of the good life and our relationship to addiction. Diana Winston's witty contribution, "You Are What You Download," reveals her addiction to meditation and deconstructs the allure of the Internet and its ability to cloud her mind. Pieces by Duncan Ryuken Williams and editor Kaza remind us of the environmental devastation that the world suffers as a result of our mindlessness.

But don't turn away thinking you can't handle another reminder of everything you do wrong. This collection is tempered by instruction on practicing with desire. In "Just Enough," Rita Gross reminds us, as Chögyam Trungpa did, that we can avoid getting stuck between the trapdoors of "too much" and "too little" and learn to work harmoniously with the phenomenal world. Norman Fischer offers some basic Zen teachings on contemporary commerce, and is not averse to sharing his appreciation of the material world. David Loy and Linda Goodhew throw in a somewhat metaphysical treatise on how we consume time, making it our most precious resource.

The variety of voices—neither too scholarly nor too elementary—should appeal to anyone, regardless of practice and experience. And the range of subjects discussed—green power, globalization, Hollywood, self-esteem, self-denial, socially engaged Buddhism—leaves little room for boredom. Can Buddhism offer a new approach to help relieve the suffering of consumerism? This book, easy enough to get hooked on, is certainly a good place to start. ♦

Colette DeDonato is a poet, editor of *City of One: Young Writers Speak to the World*, and managing editor of *Turning Wheel*.

Books in Brief

Reviewed by Shane Snowdon

It's hard to imagine a better addition to the socially engaged Buddhist's bookshelf than *Field Notes on the Compassionate Life: A Search for the Soul of Kindness* (Rodale), by former *New Age Journal* editor **Marc Barasch**. Chatty, candid, and opinionated, Barasch tells readers just what he found when he went looking for compassion in himself, friends and acquaintances, renowned spiritual teachers, everyday encounters, deliberate acts of generosity and forgiveness, organized reconciliation efforts, and scientific research across species and galaxies. Kindness appeared everywhere, over and over, even among bonobo apes—persuading Barasch that “we don't need a new set of genes or extra smarts: something within us already conduces toward heartfulness, and its nature is to grow with the merest effort.” Don't miss this lively, inspiring book.

And don't pass up the chance to own the magnificent video documentary *Tibet: Cry of the Snow Lion*, which can at last be purchased as a DVD from cryofthesnowlion.com. Released to wide acclaim in 2003, the movie has informed and galvanized audiences around the world with its unique blend of images and interviews. Rare footage of Tibet's natural wonders, historic sites, and traditional culture is skillfully juxtaposed with scenes of modern, China-occupied Tibet, while commentators (including the Dalai Lama, Robert Thurman, formerly imprisoned monks and nuns, lay Tibetans at home and abroad, and Chinese officials) vividly describe the country's past, present, and prospects. Comprehensive yet concise, the movie provides a superb overview of Tibetan issues.

Buddhist scholar/activist **Joanna Macy** and poet/psychologist **Anita Barrows** have just released *In Praise of Mortality: Selections from Rainer Maria Rilke's Duino Elegies and Sonnets to Orpheus* (Riverhead). Rilke's poems, penned in 1922 after a decade of writer's block, are presented in both English and the original German, preceded by a lyrical introduction in which Macy and Barrows explore their sources and meaning.

Diane Rizzetto, abbess of Oakland's Bay Zen Center, has just released her first book, *Waking Up to What You Do: A Zen Practice for Meeting Every Situation with Intelligence and Compassion* (Shambhala). Rizzetto—a dharma heir of Charlotte Joko Beck, who provides the book's foreword—focuses on the Buddhist precepts in a distinctively down-to-earth way, drawing on her experiences as a teenage mother, high school dropout, and single parent. She also discusses the precepts in relation to a variety of social and personal challenges, including domestic violence, drunk driving, suicide, euthanasia, abortion, and war against despots.

TW consulting editor John Ellis has pointed us to **P. W. Singer's *Children at War*** (Pantheon), a searching examination of a reprehensible phenomenon. Singer, a Brookings Institution fellow, reveals that over 40 percent of the world's armed groups now use child soldiers—6 million of whom have been killed or injured in the last decade. His groundbreaking book details how children are drawn into armies and militias, how they are indoctrinated and trained, and how this widely ignored tragedy can be addressed.

David Forbes, a Brooklyn College professor, describes a unique and promising initiative in ***Boyz 2 Buddhas: Counseling Urban High School Male Athletes in the Zone*** (Peter Lang Books). The book reads like the (school counseling) textbook it is, but the story at its heart is compelling and important. Forbes led a yearlong meditation and discussion group for the members of a Brooklyn high school football team, almost all working class, from communities of color. Deeply concerned about the “impoverished inner life” of many boys and men, he offered the players meditation and mindfulness practices that they used not only to heighten their athletic prowess but also to “make peace with their own minds and let go of confining concepts of masculinity and selfhood.” ♦

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Not Turning Away, an anthology of 25 years of *Turning Wheel*, contains inspiring voices from the front lines of socially engaged Buddhism. Available at your local bookstore, from Shambhala Publications, or from Buddhist Peace Fellowship. To order from BPF, send a check or money order for \$20 (postage is included) to: BPF, P.O. Box 3470, Berkeley, CA 94703.

Button Buddha: Mindful Buttons for a Peaceful World. Original designs include Buddhist images, dharma teachings: Peace in Oneself, Peace in the World, I Am Not at War, Make Art Not War. These mini-paintings are created (and worn!) by longtime BPFer Ruth Klein. <buttonbuddha@mindspring.com>, www.buttonbuddha.com, or 718/897-4746.

Tea Circle: Full line of supplies and arts for Japanese tea ceremony. Visit our website, www.tea-circle.com, or call 707/792-1946 or 415/499-8431.

The Conch-Us Times: Journal of the Grateful Buddhists of America focuses on the Grateful Dead, spiritual, political, and environmental issues, socially engaged Buddhism, music, art, poetry, etc. \$8/year (\$12 foreign), payable to Ken Sun-Downer, P.O. Box 769, Idyllwild, CA 92549; <conchustimes@yahoo.com>; www.conchustimes.org.

The Faithful Fools Street Ministry presents *The Witness*, directed by Martha Boesing. The play is based on the ten ox-herding pictures from ancient Zen Buddhist teachings and on the testimonies of street retreatants with the Faithful Fools. The compelling story follows the journey of a young woman onto the streets. The 50-minute presentation can be performed in your home, church, meeting hall, or school. Fees negotiable or by donation. For more information, call Martha Boesing at 510/530-6188.

New Website: The Meditation Spot helps Internet searchers find a suitable meditation practice by profiling prominent teachers in every tradition. www.meditationspot.com.

New: BPF e-Newsletter! Want to stay up-to-date about BPF and the world of socially engaged Buddhism between issues of *Turning Wheel*? Subscribe to BPF's new monthly e-newsletter. Sign up at www.bpf.org.

BPF publications:

Making the Invisible Visible, writings by people of color and their white allies about healing racism in our Buddhist communities. Available on the Spirit Rock website, www.spiritrock.org.

Safe Harbor, ethical guidelines, process, and resources for Buddhist communities. \$7 (includes postage), available from BPF, 510/655-6169; bpf@bpf.org.

Texas Freedom Sangha publishes a quarterly newsletter for/about Buddhist prisoners in Texas. Texas prisoners can request free subscriptions, info on other services and/or submit articles, sutra quotes, etc., for publication. Contact us at: Texas Freedom Sangha, 519 South Sylvania Ave., Ft. Worth, TX 76111-2241.

GROUPS

Green Sangha: Spiritually Based Environmental Activism. Groups meet in Oakland and Marin County. Form a group in your hometown. Call 415/459-8610; www.greensangha.org. (See ad below.)

Mindfulness, Diversity, and Social Change Sangha, blending mindfulness practice in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh with social change work, meets weekly in Oakland. Contact Olga at 510/540-0141; <mindful@rightbox.com>.

VOLUNTEER/DONATIONS/ SPONSORSHIP

Prison Dharma Network (PDN) needs your donations of dollars and used dharma books (no magazines please!) to continue making the Dharma available to prisoners. If you are interested in joining PDN, please visit our website: www.PrisonDharmaNetwork.org. Send donations to PDN, P.O. Box 4623, Boulder, CO 80306-4623. 303/544/5923; <pdn@indra.com>.

Please lend us a hand! October 2005 is the 20th Anniversary of the Peace Pagoda in Leverett, MA. To celebrate, we will inaugurate the New Temple! Please help us with cooking, lawn mowing, garden work, construction, painting, computer input, temple cleaning, etc. Contact Leverett Peace Pagoda, 100 Cave Hill Road, Leverett, MA, 01054; 413/367-2202.

From the State Pen to Penn State. If you believe in second chances, you can help Dirk Van Velzen in his pursuit of a degree in business administration at Penn State, where his G.P.A. is, thus far, 4.0. Since incarcerated students are precluded from federal financial aid, Dirk has been marketing calendars made with drawings from talented incarcerated artists. The calendars are \$19.99 and the proceeds will help fund his undergraduate tuition in addition to a number of scholarships for other incarcerated students. Visit us online: www.prison-scholar.com or call 800/111-2222.

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BPF could not survive without help from all of you! We hereby gratefully acknowledge contributions above membership received in 2005:

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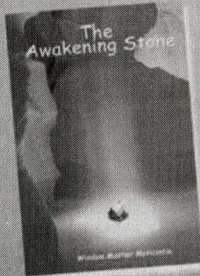
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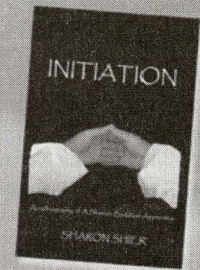
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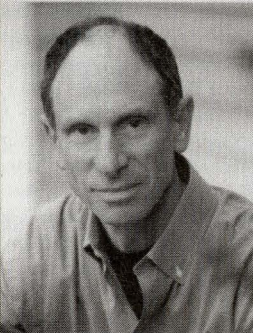
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