POSTCARD 18 FROM ROBINA: SANTA CRUZ, SUNDAY, JANUARY 22, 2012

My six weeks in Boston came to an end on January 13 with my four-plus-hour bus ride to New York to fly to San Francisco. When I first arrived in New York late November from Amman and needed to get to Boston, I took the Amtrak train. This time I discovered there are many bus companies that run incredibly cheap services between various cities. I chose Megabus, which cost $15; Amtrak was something like $60! Apparently they keep it so cheap because they don't have much infrastructure: they drop you on a street corner in New York, 38th and 7th Avenue. No complaints from me.

My Boston-to-NYC bus; and Liza, me and Sally in Belfast, ME.

During my stay in Boston, I ventured out on little journeys here and there: New York a couple of times, to see my friends at Shantideva, which I talked about before. And I spent a few days there at Christmas. I also went to my friend Gary Keiser's center in Williamsburg, Vermont and to the Staffords in Pownal, Maine. And I saw Sally and Liza in Belfast, also in Maine.

In Pownal, Troy, a master frame-maker and gilder, and his wife Mer have three daughters: Maddy, Mia and Maude. We had a class at a center they run, plus a birthday party for Mia, who turned 8.

In New York, the day before I flew to California, I stayed with a new friend, Sarah Jane Freymann, a literary agent, on the Upper West Side. She'd come up to me after one of the teachings in December and we chatted. One of her clients is Jarvis Masters, a Buddhist on death row at San Quentin, whose amazing *Finding Freedom* has touched hearts worldwide. His new book is *That Bird Has My Wings.*

With Sarah Jane in New York; Jarvis on San Quentin's Death Row in California

In the evening we went to the opera at the Met: Faust by Gounod. It was awful! A dark and depressing story, based on the story of the man who sold his soul to the devil in return for the pleasures of life. As Sarah Jane pointed out, the only person who attempted to do anything good by the end of it was the devil! But the Met, which I hadn't visited before, was gorgeous: I loved the stunning gold-leafed ceilings.

On Saturday morning, before my flight to San Francisco, we were chatting about my love of jazz, in particular Miles Davis, and Sarah Jane said, "Oh, I met him years ago." I was all ears! It turns out that she was on the beach in Europe somewhere (she's English-born), a pretty 17-year-old, and Miles and Bill Cosby came up to her and chatted, and she went out with them and others for dinner. I demanded every detail I could get – but she couldn't remember much. She said they were the first Americans she'd met. Then she told me that her father had been for years the doctor of Thelonius Monk – the family moved to New York – and that she'd met him too. I was impressed!

Thelonius Monk and Miles

Upon arrival at San Francisco I rented a car and drove the hour south to San Jose to stay the night with Harvey Horrocks, my old friend from our days together in England in the late 1970s, and his wife Angela Wang, a Chinese doctor. They work hard at their business, helping centers make money.

Then it was to Land of Medicine Buddha in Soquel, 70 miles south of San Francisco and 5 miles along Highway 1 from Santa Cruz. I hadn't been there for three years. This was my home from late 1994 when I first moved over from Vajrapani Institute in Boulder Creek, 40 minutes away, until we all upped and moved to Taos in New Mexico in 2000. I worked for FPMT International Office then, as editor of *Mandala*.

I'd arrived in the US six months before that, in June 1994. I'd been based very contentedly at Kopan Monastery in Nepal for 18 months, helping with some of the courses for visitors and editing books of Lama Yeshe's and Lama Zopa Rinpoche's. Out of the blue I got a letter from Petra McWilliams (now called Tenzin Chogkyi), who was director at Vajrapani: she asked me if I'd like to be the spiritual program coordinator there. Immediately I thought, "No way do I want to go back to the West!" I was delighting in monastery life, so easy-going, and so pleased to be able to work on my lamas' books. I was about to write to Petra with a no and again, out of the blue, a note came from Lama Zopa Rinpoche, which said something like this: "I've heard that you've been invited to Vajrapani. I've done an observation and it seems that it would be of much benefit for others if you go to America and not much benefit for you; and if you stay at Kopan it would be very beneficial for you but not much benefit for others. But of course, you decide."

"No!" I thought and went running off to Geshe Lama Konchog, crying that I didn't want to go to the West. I want to stay here! "It's all right," he said kindly. "If you don't like it you can come back." So simple! So practical! So I went. That was nearly 18 years ago.

This time around, I enjoyed myself in Soquel. Every lunch break during my course I was off in my car to visit friends: Jon and Truus Landaw, whom I've known since the 1970s in England. Harvey was the director of the center there and Jon, like me, worked for Wisdom Publications. I also had lunch with Briege and Chuck Walbridge, who were in England too, then afternoon tea with Karuna and Pam Cayton: Land of Medicine Buddha used to belong to Karuna's family. Lama always had his eye on it, back in the early 1980s. Osel Hita, Lama Yeshe's reincarnation, has been staying with Karuna and Pam over the years, since he was a young boy. On his Facebook page, he refers to them as "family."

Osel Rinpoche with his girlfriend Mai, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and younger brother Kunkyen in Bodhgaya in January.

In November he went back to India, the first visit since leaving Sera Je Monastery 10 years ago. Regular reports appeared on his Facebook page, such as:

"To light a candle is to cast a shadow. There cannot be light without darkness. These are both different aspects of the same coin. Just like from the darkest clouds pure clean clear drops of rain can fall. (At least before the pollution got so bad that is!!)

"Sometimes there are bumps on the road that are part of the learning and making mistakes is not bad, its good… as long as we learn from it, and keep improving.

At the Kopan House in Sera.

"Imagine the planet like this huge school and each of us have to live and learn what our destiny brings through our actions. As long as we are true to ourselves, and aware of what the essence in life is, then we can advance quickly. But don't try to walk the same river twice, or stay in one place while the river flows against us, coz its gonna be the hard way to the same change that we are going through every day and every moment of our life. And in the end we always end up back in square one. HERE and NOW."

To my ears he sounds more like a hippie than we did in the 1960s!