POSTCARD 25 FROM ROBINA: MELBOURNE, MAY 27, 2012

I think I had been to Wodonga once or twice before, passing through on my way between Sydney and Melbourne, taking the usual route that most people take, along the Hume Highway. In the state of Victoria, right on the border of NSW, it's virtually one city now with the NSW city called Albury, so more often than not people refer to Albury/Wodonga. I arrived around three in the afternoon. It was quite chilly and rain was falling.

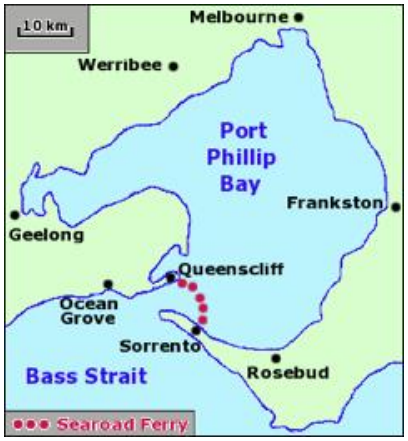
There's been an FPMT group there for a while, and now Julie Klose runs it. From Albury station we drove straight to a restaurant where we had dinner with about 15 of her Shen Phen Ling people. Then to the local community hall for a public talk. I stayed the night with Julie and her husband Russel. Her son Ry had driven up from Melbourne for the talk and I went with him back down again, leaving at 5 a.m., where I had to be by 10 o'clock in order to give an all-day workshop at 16th Street Actors Studio. It's an acting studio run by my dear friend Kim Krejus from Tara Institute, the FPMT center in Melbourne, an actor herself. It seems to be doing a pretty good job.

I'd never met a group of actors before and thus hadn't delved too deeply into what motivates them to do their job. I was impressed! It seems they have the wish to really go deeply into the minds of human beings to discover what drives them, first of all;

and second, which was very powerful for my mind, in learning to know what drives them and therefore to play them authentically in a film or play, they had to be truly open to their character, no matter how evil: they had to accept their qualities and not judge them. That's very courageous, it seems to me: opposite to the usual instinct to separate ourselves from others and to find fault in them. They were so open to the Buddhist views about going deeply into our own minds and identifying our neuroses, fears, and miseries, and how it is that they hold us back from becoming who we really are and, of course, what limits us from our ability to empathize with others. We did a Tara meditation and they liked a lot the psychology of tantra: identifying with our marvelous potential for love and wisdom and courage and the rest, and imagining being that right now.

I was moved by the 16th Street Studio actors' heartfelt wish to delve deep into what makes human beings tick. Photos 16th Street Actors Studio.

We finished at 5 p.m., then it was to sister Julie's in Carlton and dinner with some of my siblings. Jan was down from Sydney for the football, and Marie was able to come from Ocean Grove, 90 minutes away on the eastern side of Port Philip Bay. Judy and Polly had to come only a couple of kilometers, from Brunswick and Fitzroy. The only one who couldn't make it was Tony our brother, who as a chiropractor had a job a couple of hours away.



We're very close in age, the seven of us. Our mother had eight babies in nine and a half years, starting when she was 33, one of our sisters dying as a baby. Now we're all old (Jan is 68 and Tony, the youngest, is 59) – we can no longer even call ourselves middle-aged! – we feel and look pretty much the same age. As children, we fought in the ways that siblings do, but as we've gotten older we all seem to have made the decision to get along. Even though

Julie, middle, and Jan visited me at Kopan in 1991, where I was based then.

Just around the corner from Julie's place in Carlton, which is famous for its Italian cafes and Victorian architecture (above); photo Dean Melbourne.

We're similar in many ways, inevitably we have many differences, but we leave the differences aside when we're together and have developed a genuine appreciation for each other's qualities. For myself, I truly admire every one of them: their efforts over the years to work on their minds, to deal with the dramas of life; and every one of them has a big, open heart and a true wish to help others. I love my sisters and brother dearly.

But luckily I don't miss them. It's always been that way. When I was 14 my mother made me become a boarder at Sacré Cœur, the convent I'd been going to since I was 5 – meaning I had to live there fulltime. She was freaking out about my behavior: there I was, dressing up in high heels, lipstick, and my favorite pink, fluorescent earrings from Woolworths, prancing up and down Murrumbeena Road trying to attract the attention of Tony Cincotta, the 16-year-old son of our local greengrocer. I'll never forget her reprimand: “You have the audacity. . .” I didn't hear the rest of it because I was captivated by this new word, trying to work out how it was spelled – "o-r-d-a-c-i-t-y" perhaps? Anyway, the point is, I didn't mind leaving home at all. I had discipline in my life for the first time, regular hours, plenty of study time, and Mass every morning. It’s odd that there I was trying to attract the boys but at the same time yearning for oneness with God, thinking about the meaning of life, and, I remember, even learning the entire Mass in Latin (and being so jealous of the altar boys). There didn’t seem to be any contradiction in my mind. I thrived at boarding school: I tasted my intellectual potential for the first time, and surely it was my introduction to a monastic way of life. It suited me, for sure.

Top row, left to right: Our mother Agnes, known as Billy, me, Tony, Jan, Judy, Marie, our father Ted; bottom row: Julie, Polly, in the front garden of our home in St. Kilda, by the beach in Melbourne, in 1966. This is the last photo of all of us as a family: Marie and I left for London the following year and our father died in 1969.

Top row, left to right: Jan, me, Julie; bottom row: Tony, Polly, Judy, Marie, in the front garden of our home in Murrumbeena, in the southeastern suburbs of Melbourne, in 1954 or so, when I was getting on for 10.

The chapel at Sacré Cœur in Glen Iris, Melbourne, where I spent many happy hours from the age of 5 until I left school at 16. I went to morning Mass here seven days a week when I was a boarder during my last two years.

The back of the chapel. Upstairs is where I'd sing, as part of the choir, on special holy days.

And it's been the same since I left Australia in 1967, when I was 23. Until I was ordained in 1978, I'd get back to see family every couple of years. It was always a pleasure, but I'd be gone again, back to my life, without a second thought.

Saturday was party time again. My friend and fellow-student of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Jane Lewis, offered dinner at her home for some of my Buddhist friends, whom I don't usually mix with my family. As well as Jane and me, Dave and Allys Andrews, Pearly Black, Fiona Harrison, Rosetta Isma, and Anna Halafoff are students of my lamas; Ian and Ruth Gawler are students of Sogyal Rinpoche; Neil is a student of Zasep Rinpoche; and Johanna Selleck is a student of Traleg Rinpoche. It was a lovely, lovely evening.

Jane, standing, put on a meal for me and my Buddhist friends at her home in South Yarra.

Sunday was my last day in Australia; off to Europe for three months. Julie drove me to airport for my flight to Sydney, where I connected to Qantas Flight 1 for London, via Singapore, a 24-hour journey. I'll land in Sydney again March 2013.