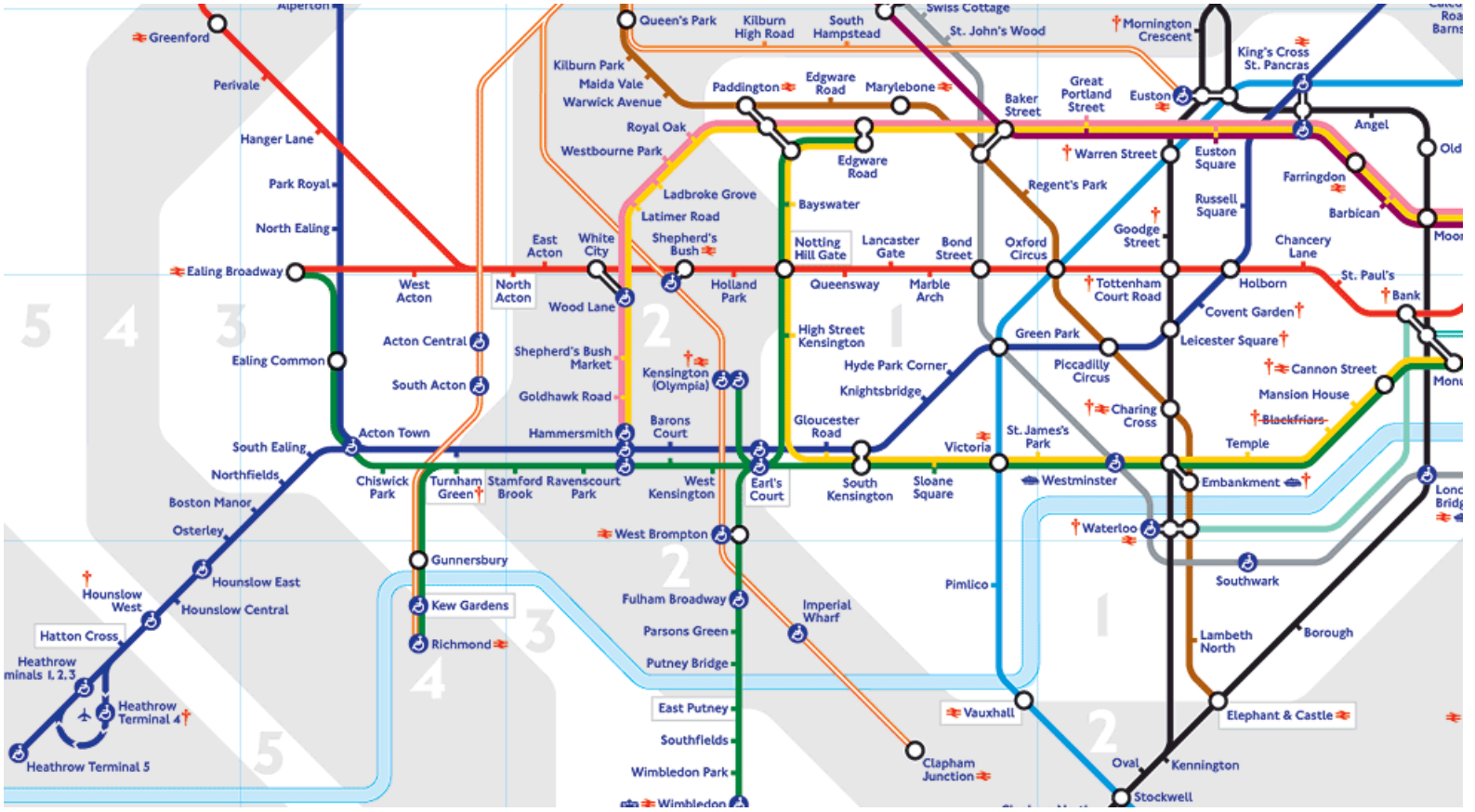
POSTCARD 26 FROM ROBINA: LONDON, JUNE 6, 2012

Sydney to London was a direct flight, pretty much: we had a stopover for a couple of hours in Singapore and then back on the same plane, arriving in London at 6:30 in the morning of Monday May 28, about 26 hours after leaving Sydney.

I took the underground train from the airport – the Tube, they call it in London. See "Heathrow Terminal 5" in the bottom left below, the blue line, called the Piccadilly Line. It went to Leicester Square, about 20 stops and 45 minutes – in the middle, below, towards the right. Then changed to the Northern Line, the black one, for the last few stations till Kennington, due south, just across Westminster Bridge, southeast of the West End. Jamyang, Lama Zopa Rinpoche's center in London, is a five-minute walk from there, which is where I stayed.



Westminster on the north bank of the River Thames, Westminster Bridge, the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben. Photo travelstay.com.

I don't get jetlag these days – but I do get tired. Before I left Melbourne I'd bought myself a ticket to the only concert in London that Esperanza Spalding was to give, that evening – in fact, I timed my arrival in London to ensure I'd get to see her. But by the time the evening came I was too tired, so went to bed instead.

So who's this Esperanza Spalding? She's a dakini, that's who! Well, so it seems to me. She's a jazz musician who plays every imaginable kind of music, and sings and writes. She's played the double bass since she was a teenager. She seems to have exploded onto the music scene, beating Justin Bieber at the Grammys for Best New Artist last year – which, apparently, prompted some of his fans to send her death threats, so distressed were they by this affront!

Jazz dakini Esperanza Spalding. Photo greenobles.com.

One of her recent songs is a poem of William Blake's.

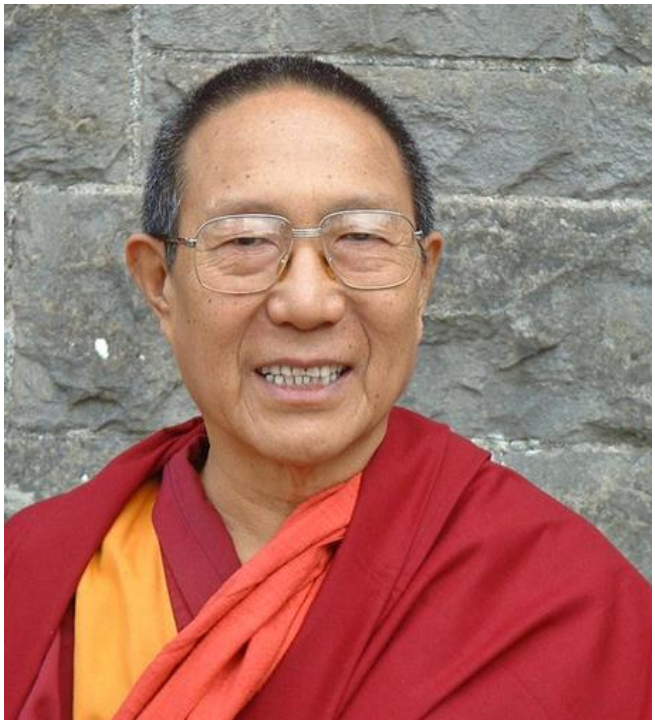
Little fly,
Thy summer's play
My thoughtless hand
Has brushed away.

Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?

For I dance
And drink, and sing,
Till some blind hand
Shall brush my wing.

If thought is life
And strength and breath
And the want
Of thought is death,

Then am I
A happy fly
If I live,
Or if I die?



Panchen Rinpoche, who in 1946, when he was seven, was one of the five candidates for the previous Panchen Lama; Rinpoche runs centers in both Southern and Northern Ireland. Photo Jampa Ling.

I had a couple of days free before my scheduled weekend job at Jamyang so went to Belfast the next day and stayed with a dear friend Lynn, who runs a center there for Panchen Rinpoche.

The Troubles – what the Irish refer to as the years of struggles between the pro-British and pro-Irish that erupted as a result of the death of 13 at the hands of the British army in Londonderry in 1972 – seem to have calmed down these days. (Of course, there have been "troubles" in Ireland for centuries.) I remember that event well. I was in London at the time and, being involved in radical left politics, I joined a demonstration in protest against what had become known as Bloody Sunday. We were going along Whitehall and all of a sudden there was shouting, fighting, punching, people running, rubbish bins flying through the air, police horses rearing up. I remember it as eerily silent and slow, although it has to have been exactly the opposite. A policeman told me to move and, being stubborn, I didn't. Too bad for me. The next thing I know is I'm being dragged kicking and screaming along Fleet Street, a policeman on each limb, then chucked into a police bus. All I remember is much self-pity and crying, and a desperate craving for a cigarette, which I was denied. (I smoked at least 60 Marlboros a day back then.) Nothing came of it, luckily.

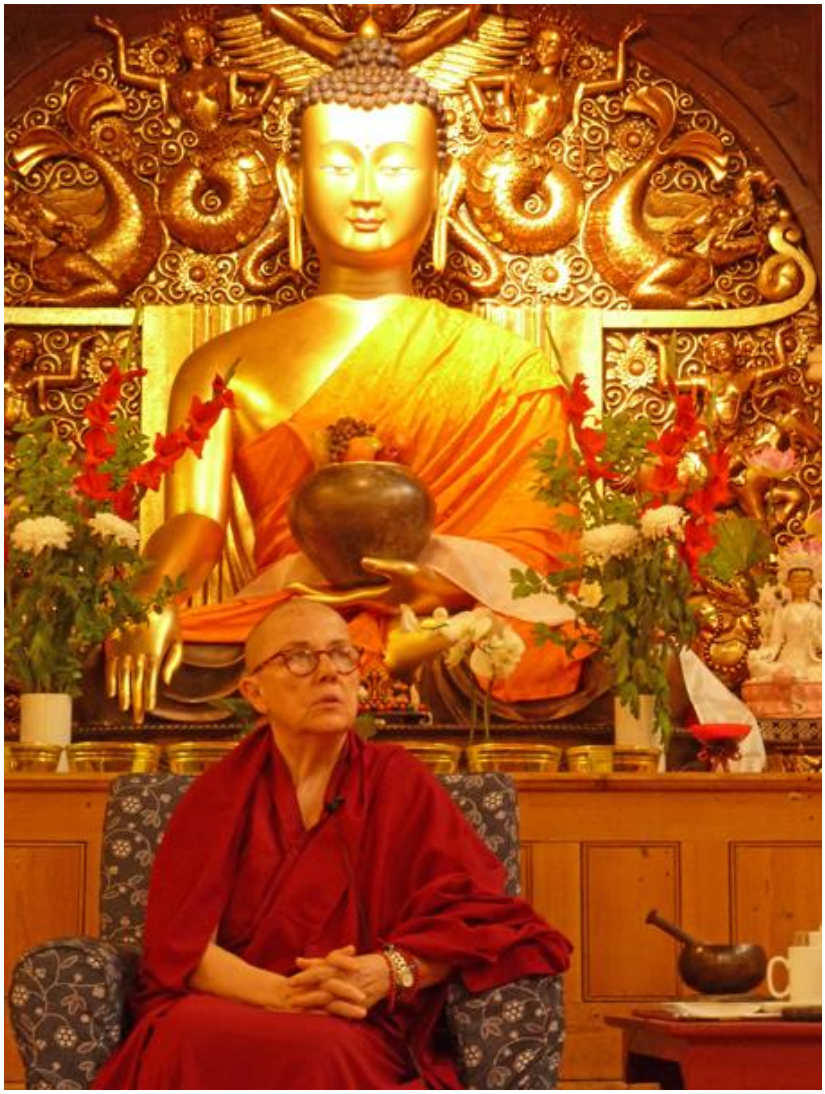
Interestingly, the building that Jamyang in London moved into years ago is a Victorian courthouse that specialized in trials of the IRA during that very period. There are miniature cells at the back on the ground floor, which people stay in these

days, which are no bigger than the length of a bed and a bit wider. Still visible on the wooden doors is the carved graffiti of the Irish prisoners – F--k the English!

The historic Victorian courthouse in Lambeth, east London, which houses Jamyang, was built in 1869. The old police holding-cells are now guest rooms. Photos Jamyang Buddhist Centre.

The weekend of our course was the celebration of the Queen's 60th anniversary as monarch, her Diamond Jubilee. Millions turned out throughout the United Kingdom, it seems. One of the highlights was thousands of boats joining the Royal Barge on the River Thames.

I had a few days off in London and had hoped for a bit of hanging out, but no time. I still had more work to do on Rinpoche's book about helping people at the time of death, so I sat in my little back room (not one of the cells) and worked. I went for a long walk on Monday night after the festivities were over: into the West End, through Green Park, along the Mall, Trafalgar Square, and back again across the river to Kennington, not far from Elephant & Castle. Many places in London, like the Elephant, as it's called, are named after the local pubs ("public house"). And I went out one night with Jamyang's director Mike Murray into Westminster for a meal, then home again, taking a route along the Thames.



The nine-foot Buddha in the center's gompa, built by Peter Griffin, is where the courthouse judge would have sat; photo Jamyang Buddhist Centre.

The crowd in the Mall facing Buckingham Palace during the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

The Queen waving from the palace balcony; photo Getty Images. The Royal Barge on the Thames, below; photo Facundo-Arrizabalaga for the EPA; boats bearing flags of the commonwealth; photo Suzanne Plunkett for Reuters.

I've just read *Johnson's Life of London: The People Who Made the City That Made the World*, a very funny and interesting – and prejudiced! – history of the place by London's current mayor, Boris Johnson. He's quite a famous fellow in the UK: an old Etonian, like the prime minister David Cameron, and loved by some and disliked by others, like all politicians I suppose.

Soon after arriving in London for the first time, in 1967, age 23, typing a friend's book on my 1950s Royal typewriter.

Such a familiar place to me, London, in many ways more than Melbourne where I grew up. The five years I initially spent in this vast, ancient city, from when I first left Australia in 1967 when I was 23, were a pretty intense time for me.

On Thursday June 7 Mike took me to Paddington Station for the overground train to the airport – 10 minutes this one took – where I got my flight to Madrid. I was scheduled to spend nearly three weeks in Spain.