POSTCARD 30 FROM ROBINA: NEW YORK, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2012

I arrived in New York from Amman via London on August 30. Two days to relax before driving up with my old friend John Sutton for a course at Milarepa Center in the Vermont countryside. There's a big old farmhouse there that has housed the center for 30 years. Amy Miller runs the place now and has big plans for growing the center according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche's vision. The FPMT has no good retreat centers on the East Coast; it's on nearly 300 acres and could be an amazing place.

Milarepa Center, Lama Zopa Rinpoche's center in Barnet, Vermont, where I taught over Labor Day Weekend. Photos Milarepa Center.

New York again, this time for five days off, staying with Lana Popovic on 19th Street at Second Avenue. She's a designer who helped us during the Happiness conference that we ran in San Francisco in 2008. She's now working with a friend to develop a line of lingerie, jewelry and gowns called *Lana Mina.* She wants to make money so she can help Dharma projects. I'm all for that. If we're living in this commercial world

and attempting to live the bodhisattva way of life, this is a perfect way to use the resources we have. There's nothing inherently good or bad about money, about commerce; it's the motivation that counts. For the bodhisattva, everything is grist for the mill.

The stupa at Milarepa Center, Vermont.

This is what drove me when I ran Liberation Prison Project: I find the usual begging mentality of non-profits not so productive. I gradually became convinced over the years that the best way to bring in dollars was through commerce. We know this so well in our modern world, we are good at it. And it works: we all love to buy things! And basically, it's harder for most of us to give money for nothing than to give money for receiving something in return. During the 14 years that I ran the prison project and raised more than $3.5 million, I never did one begging letter to anyone. I don't like the passivity of begging; I think it's far more dynamic and more virtuous to proactively find ways to make money.

In New York I stay with Lana Popovic, who is starting a business to support Dharma projects. Photo Lana Popovic.

I saw this so clearly in 2009, in Australia, raising money for the prison project. We were going to have a fundraising dinner at a restaurant after a weekend course in Sydney. We met during the previous week and discussed it: it seemed that 40 people or so had booked up for the meal and by the time you'd paid the restaurant you'd maybe clear $2,000. That would have lasted us about two days – our monthly budget was something like $30,000. So we decided to quickly put together an auction at the center and offer people a meal. We got about 30 items – statues, paintings, tangkas, framed prisoners' art, Tibetan jewelry. It was amazing to watch people bidding! Without effort we cleared something like $20,000. It was win-win: people got a nice thing and we raised money, and people felt good that their buying something helped the prison project. I then decided we'd hold more of these events. Throughout the year we did three cocktail party-auctions: another in Sydney, and one each in Melbourne and Brisbane. They worked like a dream. Altogether we raised around $90,000. What was clear was the pleasure people had at the events: so eager to buy things and so pleased their money was helping the prisoners. And there was no need to ever do any begging at all; you don't need to. Just put lovely things out there and we'll buy them. Nothing wrong with that!

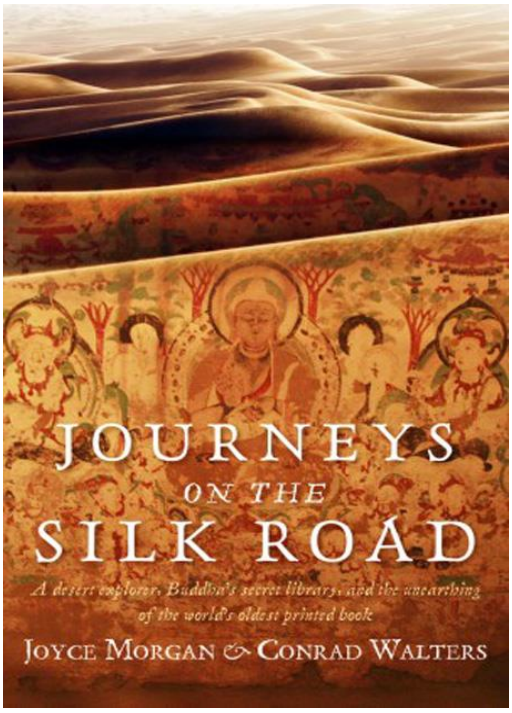
Vajrayana Institute Director Tony Steel and me (above) at a cocktail party-auction we did in Brisbane in 2009 to raise money for Liberation Prison Project – Tony was our auctioneer. Guests gather as the auction begins at our Melbourne event, also in 2009, at the home of my sister Judy.

After New York I flew across country to Portland, OR, for a week, September 7-13, teaching a weekend course at Maitripa College, and staying mostly at Kate Macdonald's apartment and briefly at Carina Rumrill's with her family. I worked with both of them in San Francisco: they were friends and volunteered at the prison project. Soon we hired them full time. Carina moved to Portland in 2008, editing Mandala; and Kate spent a year with me in Australia, moving to Portland last year. I talked about them in Postcard 19 in February last year.

Portland, OR, where I taught at FPMT's Maitripa College in mid-September, and where our international office is based. Photo Amy S.

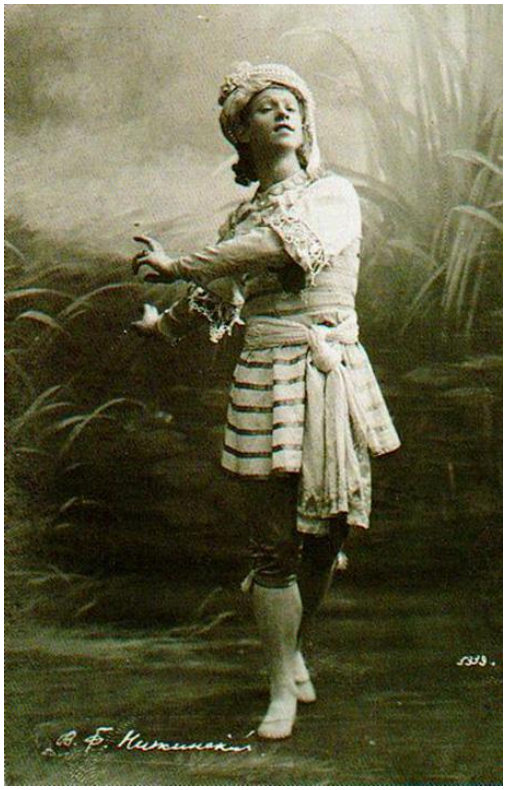
Back in New York again, this time to teach at Shantideva and stayed for 10 days. They're doing a great job at that center. For years and years there was never any FPMT presence in this huge city, so it's good to see something growing. They use Gelek Rinpoche's center downtown for some classes and the rest at Tibet House, a very nice place on West 15th Street. My friend from Sydney, Joyce Morgan, was in town publicizing her book Journeys on the Silk Road about the unearthing of the world's oldest printed book, the Diamond Sutra. She has recently retired from her job as a newspaper journalist, the arts writer first for The Australian and then The Sydney Morning Herald. We met in India 25 years ago. She'd get tickets for the opera or the ballet at the Sydney Opera House, I remember, and I'd go with her.

This time in New York I bought tickets for The New York City Ballet at the Lincoln Center. A very grand place, and Joyce thought the ballet was far superior to the companies in Australia.



My friend Australian journalist Joyce Morgan's new book Journeys on the Silk Road *(above), which she co-wrote with her husband fellow journalist Conrad Walters, and which she was in New York promoting. Dancers from the New York City Ballet (below), who Joyce and I saw perform at Lincoln Center. Photo Paul Kolnik/New York City Ballet.*

Ballet was the first of my many fantasies as a little girl. An eccentric friend of our mother's, Jock – actually, one of her many devoted music students whom she taught singing and piano to – because he was forever moving house would leave his possessions at various friends' places. We had lots of his wonderful books, and I adored reading. I'll never forget one marvelous treasure: a big, old, pink silk-brocade-bound book about the history of ballet up till the early 20th century. I was enthralled by the color prints of the dancers, and I'll never forget the name Nijinsky. How I yearned to be like them. I begged my mother to allow me to study ballet, and I did. Well, in fact I didn't – I had plenty of ideas in my head about dancing but never practiced. I remember vividly throughout my childhood the awful disconnect between the aspiration to do something and the inability to commit myself to accomplishing it. Anyway, once a week after school I'd go into the city on the train, get off at Flinders Street Station, walk up a block-and-a-half along Swanston Street, turning right onto Little Collins Street, up the hill and into Australian dancer Peggy Seager's husband's studio on Pink Alley. The highlight was appearing in a crowd scene in the opera La Boheme at the Saturday matinee at Her Majesty's Theatre.



The great 20th century Russian dancer and choreographer Nijinsky, whose name, upon reading as a little girl in a book on the history of ballet, captured my imagination.

In New York I gave a talk at Queer Dharma, which uses the Shambhala Center as their venue. The place was packed. In San Francisco, too, I have a connection with the gay Buddhists; there are at least two groups there.

The last week of September I had to cross the country again – I didn't organize my schedule so well – to teach at one of the Canadian FPMT centers, Gendun Drubpa in Williams Lake.