POSTCARD 32 FROM ROBINA: NORTH CAROLINA-TORONTO, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2012

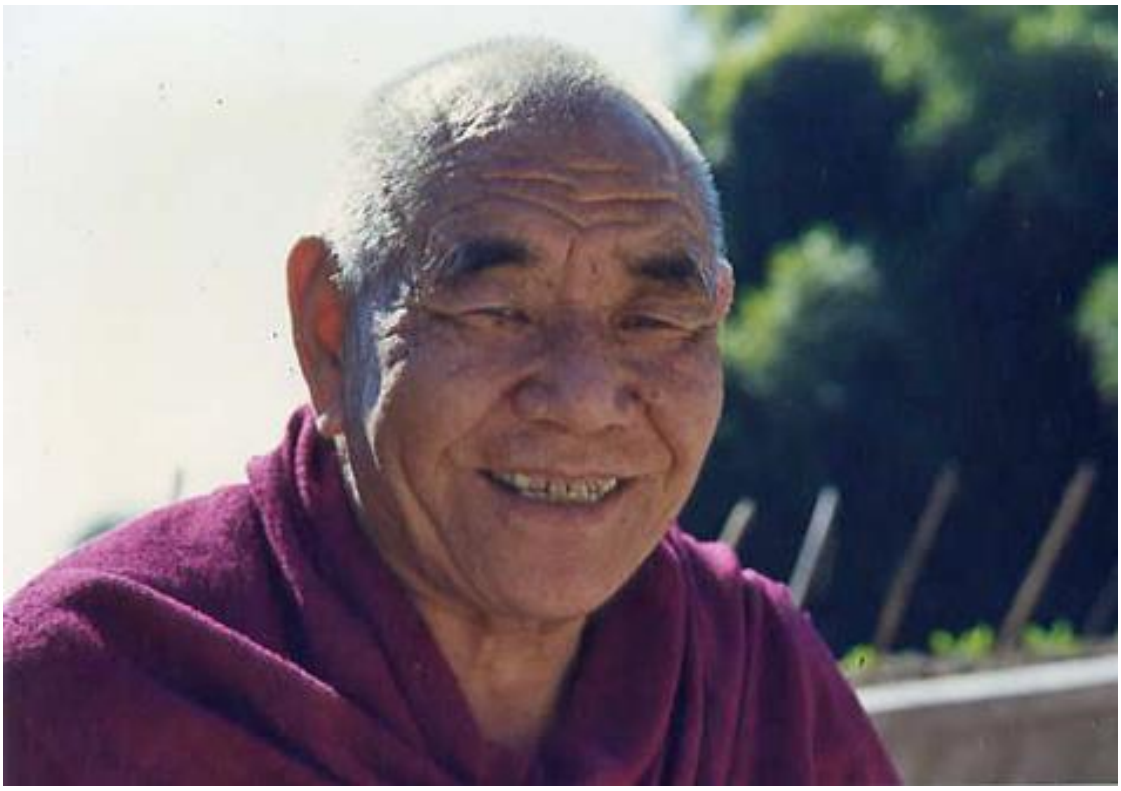
I was scheduled to fly back to New York from San Juan on October 28, but that was in the middle of Hurricane Sandy. Clearly that wasn't possible so changed direction and went straight to Raleigh in North Carolina, where I was to spend the month of November at Kadampa Center. It didn't hit that far south, so I was fortunate.

After four days of teachings at Yangsi Rinpoche's center in San Juan, Puerto Rico I flew to FPMT's Kadampa Center in Raleigh, NC for the month of November; and after that to Toronto for a week of teachings at our center there, Lama Yeshe Ling.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche had recommended various practices to avert the dangers. There are explanations in Buddhism that show that such events can be caused by interference from heavy-duty spirits.

There are also practices done by qualified yogis that can influence the weather. I heard about Lama Yeshe doing practices at Chenrezig Institute in the early days to avert rain. This is very common, it seems. Geshe Lama Konchog, Lama's dear friend from Sera Je who spent 20 years in caves in the far reaches of the mountains of Nepal, was renowned for his extraordinary feats, including changing the weather. It seems that these great yogis, having learned to utterly control their own subtler mental and physical energies, have therefore no problem in controlling the external energies. In the explanations of karma and how beings and worlds manifest, there are detailed description of the intimate relationship between the internal and external energies, namely the mind and the four elements. Buddhism – just like Galileo and the other 14th century Western scientists – still uses that model for describing the external world. So, after a couple of years in the harsh environment of the snowy Himalayas, Geshe-la's meager robes had worn out completely and he was left basically naked, but because of the power of his meditation he no longer needed

New York City just before Hurricane Sandy, the deadly 2012 hurricane that struck the Eastern United States in late October. Photo bravoandy.



Geshe Lama Konchog, Lama's dear friend from Sera Je who spent 20 years in caves in the far reaches of the mountains of Nepal (below).

clothes – or food or sleep, for that matter. He was able to generate his own inner warmth and lived for years on the energy of the elements, specifically the wind element. Lama Zopa Rinpoche said about Geshe-la that he "lived in Vajra Yogini's Pure Land." It's good to remember that we can all accomplish this! We all possess the same buddha nature.

Back to Raleigh. The highlight of the month was a cocktail party auction that the Bodhichitta Trust (which I established years ago as a vehicle for bringing in funds for Lama Zopa Rinpoche's project, including the prison project when I ran it) organized. Half the $20,000+ funds raised were offered to San Francisco's Tse Chen Ling and the rest used to repay kind supporters of the prison project when I ran it, loans that the trust had underwritten.

What a party! We'd run four of these in Australia in 2009 and raised $75,000 or $80,000 dollars, maybe more. A perfect way to raise money: give people a beautiful party and things to buy! So much easier and more effective than begging, which is the usual mode. We had 50 gorgeous items for auction: statues and tangkas from Kathmandu, huge pieces of art by Australian Aboriginals, Middle Eastern carpets.

The old prison project team from San Francisco all came and helped. We had the party in Sarah Brooks's house; she moved here from SF several years ago. Carina made the canapes, Vikrant mixed the cocktails, and Kate oversaw the entire event. Michelle, Katy, Alison, and Rashel also helped. Jaime was the auctioneer and Lana helped him. I invited my dear friend Igor Sarmientos to play his cello; I talked about him and his amazing composer father Jorge in Postcard 10 from DC. He's an accomplished orchestra conductor from Guatemala who lives in DC these days. I first met him when he ran the FPMT center in Guatemala 10 years ago and he invited me there for two weeks. Jorge passed away last year.

The cocktail party-auction our Bodhichitta Trust held in Raleigh, NC in November was a hit, raising $20,000+. My dear friend Jaime Silberman came from New York to be our auctioneer. Photo David Strevel.

Kadampa Center's director Robbie Watkins and Sarah herself both played Sarah's baby grand piano.

Kadampa Center's director, Robbie Watkins, left, and Sarah Brooks, their spiritual program coordinator, both classically trained pianists, played Sarah's baby grand for our guests. Photos Kadampa Center/David Strevel.

Guests mingle before the auction begins. We transformed Sarah Brooks's house (Sarah also worked with me for years at the prison project) into a gallery and auction house, with carpets, artwork and holy objects adorning the walls. Photo David Strevel.

The old San Francisco prison project team, minus a few faces, came from around the country to help with the event. From left: Ven. Katy Cole, Sarah Brooks, Carina Rumrill, me, Alison Harr, Kate Macdonald, Rashel Adragna, and Michelle Stewart, who used to run Tse Chen Ling, the FPMT center we ran the prison project's San Francisco office out of for nearly a decade. Photo Alison Harr.

We also had an amazing team of local volunteers help put on the event, all Sarah's friends from Kadampa Center. Here Sandy Carlson, left, and Lisa James, offer our guests Carina's canapes and our very own champagne-cocktail. Photo David Strevel.

My dear friend Igor Sarmientos, the Guatemalan conductor, who is based in DC these days, came and played his cello, including at the end of the evening, a five-minute cello piece written by his father, the late Jorge Sarmientos, for His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Jorge was considered a national treasure in Guatemala. Prolific, music pouring out of him for 40-plus years. He passed away last year. Photo Alison Harr.

Then to Toronto for a week, to Lama Yeshe Ling. The last time I was there must have been in the mid-1970s. An uncle, Lennie Courtin, lived there with his family, moving from London in the UK as boys when my grandparents split up, with my father opting for Australia. This time it was just the center: a nice group of people, including an old friend Dekyi-Lee.

With students of Lama Zopa Rinpoche's center in Toronto, Lama Yeshe Ling at the end of 2012. Photo Lama Yeshe Ling.

I gave my gloves to a homeless friend in Toronto. Photo James Hinds.