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This year Losar is on February 16th. Temple and East Wing cleaning will occur from February 9-11 and also February 15th. There will be three days of Vajrakilaya practice from February 12-14 and Vajrasattva practice on Losar morning.

SANGHA SPOTLIGHT

Philip Thomas

by Gaea Yudron

In an interview that Clark Hansen (Jampal Gyatso) did with Philip Thomas in 2008, Philip shared some of his personal history. He was born in Saskatoon, Canada, and reported to Clark that he was a failure at school. So he began to work, at first on farms and for the railway. At 18, he joined the Navy for 12 years where he “completed a universal education,” as he put it. Philip loved being a seaman.

He married in 1957, and he and his wife had two sons and a daughter. Then his wife ran off with his best friend and took everything. “It was like a death experience,” he recalled.

Later he trained as a therapist in an LSD therapy program. Of course, there’s much more to say about LSD, but we’ll leave it at that for now.



Philip at Tashi Choling temple

He went to Europe with an actress who was making a film and worked on the film as a sound technician. Then he became an art director/set designer for films in the US. He met the woman who became Tara’s mother. They lived in Mexico, and Tara was born there. Of course,



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there's more to the story of Philip Thomas, who once told me "it's good to be a little mythological," with which I am in complete agreement.



If I were asked to describe Philip Thomas to someone who had never met him, I would say something like this: Philip is a big guy with a very big heart. He has a funny (in both senses of the word) sense of humor. He's an artist, so naturally he has a vivid imagination and creates beautiful things. You could never describe him as bourgeois or conventional. Well, you could, but it would not be accurate.

Years ago, he used to joke about how he was working on developing a Third World atmosphere on the land he bought near the Tashi Choling temple. He and his wife Teri and their kids lived in a school bus there for quite awhile. Later he built several structures, including the

beautiful house where he lives with Teri, their kids having left the nest. Philip is in his 80s now. If you ask him, "How are you?" he will usually respond, "I'm still here."

Philip was the main builder for the Tashi Choling temple. When the weather got too cold for temple building, he would travel back to Los Angeles, where gigs as a set designer for Hollywood movies gave him funds to continue helping at Tashi Choling. He served as the center president for three years in the 90s, served on the board of directors, went down to Ensenada to build the foundation for the White Tara statue there, and has contributed a great deal in terms of construction and facility maintenance over the years. Rinpoche nicknamed him Colestin Daddy, and like Rinpoche's other nicknames, this one is a good fit. It illuminates Philip's fatherly qualities, his generous hospitality, and his concern for others.

Philip met Gyatrul Rinpoche, Sangye Khandro, and Yeshe (later known as Lama Yeshe Nyima) in 1983 when they were preparing for the Los Angeles visit of His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche. "I showed up and



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Rinpoche just said, 'Oh hi, good. Well here,' and he assigned me something to do. So I did whatever I was asked to. I think I helped build the throne that His Holiness would sit on and some other things, Then His Holiness showed up at the house, and the series of empowerments went on for a number of months. During that time I met Richard Schwindt and Joel Shefflin. Richard had a plan of the temple. Gyatrul Rinpoche suggested I come to Tashi Choling with my daughter Tara and build a little house and come help build the temple."

Philip once said, "The idea of building a monastery or a temple was the greatest possible thing I could think of doing with my life." When I recently reminded him of that statement, he commented, "I still feel that way. It is just a privilege to do something meaningful. You are not working for any personal, temporary kind of reward, but doing something that will benefit others. If you believe in the dharma and you have an opportunity to find some niche to serve, then of course that is really nice. It is a good thing. Particularly I was happy doing construction."

I asked Philip about his relationship with Gyatrul Rinpoche. "Well, there seems to be a naturalness about it. It is not contrived. I see him as someone with authority, and his authority is actually something that is true. In all the years I have known him, there was the longest time when Teri would repair his clothing, the same clothing over and over again. He wasn't caught up in any sort of vanity. He did his job as a Rinpoche. His qualities and non-attachment were inspiring in the sense that he made it very natural just to be unattached to stuff. He did his job as a Rinpoche steadily without any kind of break as far as I know, and doing things not necessarily in a pleasant situation. Having to deal with us strange Western students, in a country where he didn't speak the language, with a bunch of barbarians that kind of wanted to help, but certainly don't understand the profound way that the Rinpoches communicate with each other, and how they achieve stuff."

"But he was always inspiring, as he was continuously generous and loving and parental and intelligent. You would have to be kind of blind or deaf not to pick up on the different



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qualities of Gyatrul Rinpoche, particularly after being around him for many, many years. You know it is just humbling really. Because in the *Mirror of Gyatrul Rinpoche* it is easy to see our own faults.”

I am a fan of Philip’s various get-ups and his tendency to be just a bit colorful from time to time, so I wanted to include a few photos of him that I enjoy. Perhaps you will enjoy them, too. (When I told Philip I was writing this article, he wanted to make sure that I included the fact that he is a knight. Just for good measure, I should add this. When I spoke with him the other day, he asked me if I was calling to speak with the magical hero of dharma. I was.)

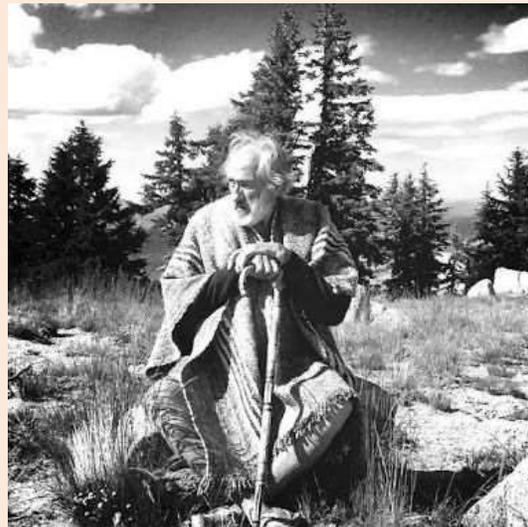
That said, I guess this is a thank you letter as well as a slightly belated birthday greeting. Thank you, Philip, for being such a steadfast, devoted, bigger than life, one of a kind sangha member and friend.

Thank you for the sacrifices you made to build the temple, and thank you for your turbans, sarongs, ponchos, and other unique wardrobe items, which have brightened our days. Thank you for everything. I am glad that the set designer and

casting director for our film magnetized you those many moons ago.



In India, you can really wear a turban



This is what his daughter Tara calls Philip’s “Moses Impression”



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Gyatrul Rinpoche and the Losar Cookies



One of Gyatrul Rinpoche's childhood memories centers on the elaborate baking that occurred in preparation for the Tibetan New Year.

“Losar time! We always got so excited! There were so many delicious things--the special tukpa, momos, and especially the cookies! My father made some amazing cookies. He made fancy cookies for each of the Seven Possessions of a Chakravartin and the Eight Auspicious Symbols. There were especially intricate depictions of the horse and elephant. He would make them, bake them, paint them, and get them all ready. We children, our mouths would be watering as we smelled those buttery, heavenly morsels! Then all of them would

disappear,” Rinpoche said, recalling the childrens' dismay. “There they were, lined up on the shrine as offerings. We were so disappointed! So, we had to watch carefully. If a cookie broke while being decorated, it wasn't fit for an offering and went to the kids. Oops! We looked for our opportunities. A poke here, a push there. Oops! Accidents happen! Our family had so many workers. There were lots of guys, and friends and children, and everybody was looking for a chance to break a cookie. So naughty! Except me. Of course I was very pure.”

Thanks to Ila Reitz for sharing this story.



photo by Samantha Cheney



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Trish DeMers and The Art of Wisdom Mind

by Gaea Yudron



Trish DeMers

When Trish DeMers first joined the sangha In 1997, she was a ceramicist. Art had been part of her life since childhood; her mother was an artist who created both paintings and sculptures. Trish learned a lot about art from her mother as she was growing up. One thing she understood early was how important it was to respect and care for materials and tools to keep them usable over time.

The year she came to Tashi Choling, Trish met Sonam Tsering, the master artist who has created so many of the center's statues. "In 1998, I had my first occasion to study with him," she recalled. "He introduced me to gold leafing while he was gilding Rinpoche's statue in the residence." The following year Trish worked with Sonam to paint the throne and walls of the Amitabha Pavilion. "During that summer, Sonam introduced me to his method of working with cement, creating molds and casting with cement. In 1999 I also began studying thangka painting in earnest."



"I have had the opportunity work with Sonam on various projects, including statue building in both clay and cement, painting decorative work on thrones and buildings, prayer wheels, gold leafing, and



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stupa building. He has also taught me torii making and statue face painting.”



White Tara, painted by Trish DeMers

“I am grateful that he accepted me as a student and that I had a chance to study with him at Tashi Choling for many years.”

Trish has a high regard for Sonam Tsering, both as an artist and a dharma practitioner. “He has such a depth of commitment to tradition,” she said. And in addition, Trish noted “his unwavering pursuit of perfecting his product to honor the dharma. His peaceful mind, always. His humility.” Originally, Trish had wanted to learn the art of Tibetan sculpture, but at the time she had two small kids that

she was homeschooling. Sonam Tsering encouraged her to learn thangka painting instead, giving her a painting grid to use for practice. There are several styles of thangka painting, and Sonam Tsering introduced Trish to two of the main styles, Mendri and Karma Gardi.



Sonam Tsering

Trish continues to study with Sonam Tsering long distance, sending him photos of her work in progress. After he reviews the photos, he calls her and they talk. Though it is a slower and more challenging process, Trish



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is happy that their teacher-student relationship continues.

A number of Trish's thangkas hang at Tashi Choling. Two of them, of Vajrakilaya and Vajrasattva, are in the temple, mounted on posts. There is also a thangka of Khandro Tuk Tik that Trish painted in the temple. In addition, she painted a big Refuge Tree that hangs in the upper hall of the East Wing, and there is a reproduction of a White Tara thangka she painted in the East Wing, at the top of the stairs that lead to the carport.

You can also view some of her work in the hallway that leads to the bookstore in the East Wing. How fortunate we are to have such a dedicated and skilled thangka painter in our midst.

Please keep Ani
Legshe, Antal Toth,
and Chris Abbey in
your prayers.



CARTOON CORNER

THE NEXT ISSUE OF SANGHA NEWS WILL APPEAR IN APRIL

Please email your suggestions or
news for the April issue to
gaea.laughing@gmail.com by
MARCH 15th.