

# Ven. Katy reflects on her one-year retreat on Kangaroo Island



Ven. Katy on her meditation cushion

In February **Ven. Katy Cole**, the prison project's spiritual program coordinator and member of the US board of directors, completed three consecutive deity retreats at De-Tong Ling, a retreat center on the western side of Kangaroo Island, just south of Adelaide in South Australia.



A kangaroo and one of her babies outside Ven. Katy's window

For a year she didn't have direct contact with anyone. Every two weeks **Kimball Cuddihy**, the center's director, left her a supply of food in a storage bin near her retreat house, one of five on the island. And every two to four weeks she would phone her retreat master, American nun **Ven. Lhundup Nyinge**, who has spent years in meditation retreats and who answered her questions: how to manage *lung*, a subtle anxiety energy disorder that often occurs during retreat, the best way to count mantras, when to come out of retreat, and so on.

Mainly, during these retreats Ven. Katy was trying to complete a mantra commitment for each deity. But what she was re-

ally doing, she said, was getting to see and work on her mind.

"Normally we have delusions arising all the time – anger, jealousy and so on. It's such a big mess we can't separate it all out. But during retreat everything starts to surface and then it all settles, like the dust settles, and you see what's going on inside."

During her first retreat, on Vajrasattva, the Buddha of Purification, Ven. Katy got boils, developed asthma and at times felt she couldn't finish her commitments.

"By the time I got to the second retreat, I was going through this intense purification," she said. "When things got difficult, I imagined I was doing the mantras for the prisoners, or for people who can't do them, or people in the prison project offices so busy working they don't have time to do them. I'd dedicate for every-

one. Thinking like that made it easier."

The main thing she realized, she said, was that she needed to continue to study the *lam-rim* (see page 8), the presentation of all of Buddha's teachings.

"I realized I don't know the *lam-rim* well enough. The lamas never emphasize the tantric aspect of Buddhist study in teachings – they always emphasize the *lam-rim* and developing *bodhichitta*."

Ven. Katy encountered all sorts of animals at De-Tong Ling, which is a wildlife sanctuary: possums, swallows, kangaroos, fish, goanas, a Black Tiger Snake.

She tried to save the life of a baby swallow that had been kicked out of its nest and was being eaten alive by ants, picking the ants off the bird without killing them. "You think 'nature' is so beautiful, but then you look closely and they're all eating each other," she said.

She sang the mantra *om mani padme hum* to animals she saw and would leave grass on the windowsill of her meditation room so kangaroos who would come to eat it could hear her reciting her mantras.

One day she helped a huge

fish with a black stripe down its back, mysteriously stuck in one of the garden watering holes, by moving it back to the nearby pond.

The move was a bit traumatic and at first "Tiger Fish" could only move backwards; Ven. Katy gave him physical therapy until he could swim properly again. "Then he became really aggressive," she said, "and would chase all the gold fish."

She gave him some food on her finger, he relaxed and stopped chasing the other fish. He eventually even changed colors. "He became the most beautiful fish and the most beautiful golden color."

Since February, Ven. Katy has been in Sydney working with **Ven. Chokyi**. In April, she will represent LPP at FPMT's annual meeting, the Council for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, in Toulouse, in France, after which she will return to Liberation Prison Project in San Francisco.



Tiger Fish

## Buddhafonias

The evening of the first day of the **Happiness & Its Causes conference** (see page 6) featured the world premiere of *Buddhafonias, The Sound of the Buddha*, an orchestral poem by world-renowned Guatemalan classical composer **Jorge Sarmientos** and performed by the San Francisco Sinfonietta. It was commissioned by Liberation Prison Project.

Immersed since childhood in the magic and mysticism of Catholicism, it wasn't until recently that Maestro Sarmientos first heard about Buddhism and its approach to the human mind from his son Igor, himself a Buddhist.

Here, he found himself on new ground. "This was not my father's usual musical language," said Igor, who

conducted the piece. Politically active in the 1960s, and having even spent time in prison as a result, his music over the years has reflected his views of the world. In *Buddhafonias*, he delved into the internal for the first time.

"The music was amazing," said Sydney's **Beth Phelan**. "I was in tears."

The prison project plans to make available CDs of the music.