



## Volunteer Spotlight

### An Interview with Tharina Crafford



*Tharina Crafford*

*Tharina Crafford of South Africa has been staying at Serenity Ridge for the past several months doing volunteer work, while providing for her own personal upkeep. Sue Davis-Dill interviewed her on June 25, 2010, for Voice of Clear Light.*

**VOCL:** I recall you sending an email to Tenzin Rinpoche last year offering to come to Serenity Ridge as a volunteer for six months. What inspired you to write that email?

**Tharina:** I wanted to make contact again with Rinpoche. The first retreat that I attended with him made such an impact on me. I felt I needed to grow more.

After the first retreat with Rinpoche, I felt as if there was something missing in my life. When I returned to my home in South Africa, I missed the sangha and the environment that he created at Serenity Ridge. At that first retreat I felt that I received so much and that the most natural thing that flows out of that is the feeling to try to give back something.

**VOCL:** You offered to come for six months. How were you able to arrange your life to be able to do that?

**Tharina:** When I heard back that it was okay to come for six months, there was no doubt in my mind that I would be able to arrange whatever was necessary so that I could come to the U.S. and volunteer at Serenity Ridge. I felt an overflowing sense of gratitude for this opportunity.

I worked very hard to make this happen. I changed my lifestyle to be able to save enough money to follow my dream. I had to learn how to let go of things and that has been a very good lesson. I resigned from my work, which was hard to do. I was dedicated to my job and worked with wonderful people, and I did what I needed to do to finish my work.

I felt that I had this opportunity now in my life to volunteer and I knew not to postpone. This was the most natural thing to do; in fact, it was the only thing for me to do. I trusted that everything would work out fine with my work. I felt support from both the people at my work and my family. As I made my plans, everything fell into place.

One of my biggest fears was that if I left my life in South Africa, there would be nothing to return to. Just the opposite has happened. I just received an email from people at the last place where I worked that they are wanting me back, and they are offering me an even better opportunity than I had before.

When I arrived in December, I had no idea what I'd be doing. I was surprised to find that you had read my curriculum vitae. I thought I'd be washing windows!

**VOCL:** You have greatly assisted Ligmincha Institute with its financial structure.

**Tharina:** I've interacted with management, staff and the Ligmincha Council. I've found the environment tremendously open and transparent. I have been blown away by the dedication of the people who I've had the privilege to work with. They work very hard. With openness they

received my ideas and suggestions for changes. I've been impressed with the lack of internal politics and gossip. I've not come across this in other places.

**VOCL:** How has this opportunity affected you?

**Tharina:** I have nothing else to compare this experience with, but I feel that I have grown quickly as a practitioner, a growth that otherwise might have taken me many years. This has been the perfect environment to integrate practice in my life. It's been a soft and gentle environment where I received tremendous support. This experience has emphasized for me that all that we do, everything is practice.

**VOCL:** Can you describe a typical workday for us?

**Tharina:** I'm an early riser. I get up each morning and meditate for 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Then I take a break and do some personal emails. At 9 a.m. when everyone else arrives in the office, I begin to work. I finish each workday at 3 p.m. In the afternoon, I take long walks. It's beautiful here. Sometimes I meditate again in the evening.

**VOCL:** Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**Tharina:** I'm here for a few more months. I'm already looking ahead to when I leave. What is important to me is that I have a feeling of belonging, belonging to the sangha. It is very important for me. Always to structure my life to be able to attend retreats as often as possible, and to help out wherever I can. I have a deep desire to be of service to Rinpoche. And to be a part of his mandala.

Because the environment has been so supportive, and because of the support of the senior students of Rinpoche's, it was so easy to integrate what Rinpoche teaches into my day-to-day life. I have felt tremendous support not only here at Ligmincha Institute, but also by the sangha in both Mexico and Berkeley when I traveled there to attend Rinpoche's teachings. I was met everywhere by the openness of sangha, and being a part of Rinpoche's worldwide mandala.

*Photograph by Polly Turner*