



# BODHI TIMES

enevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight

Founding Patron: His Holiness XIV Dalai Lama

Founded 1989

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Guiding principle: Skillful, compassionate action

Goal: Improve health, education and the environment in developing countries by providing a hook, not a fish

BODHI provides a framework for altruistic people worldwide who are not comfortable working with traditional religious or secular organisations. We ask only for a kind heart.

we work in developing countries with local partners on innovative projects to help health, education, the environment, and human rights. We welcome the unusual, the unglamorous, the dispossessed and the disenfranchised.

## Susan Starr Woldenberg Butler

BODHI's beloved co-founder, Susan Woldenberg Butler, died peacefully, surrounded by Buddhist prayer, on October 4, 2014, in Canberra, Australia. In California, where most of her family still live, it was the start of Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, the day of atonement.

Susan was born in Lafayette, Louisiana, USA, on May 4, 1948. Her father, Newton Woldenberg, had just returned from the Pacific theatre of World War II, where he served in Australia and New Guinea. A member of Mensa, Newt loved poetry and philosophy, including that of Asia. Newt and his young wife, Irene, had moved to the American South from Madison, Wisconsin, to work for Newt's uncle, the businessman and philanthropist Malcolm Woldenberg. Uncle Mal lived in a grand house in New Orleans, on Napoleon Street, which Susan loved to visit. She lived in two other Southern places, the town of Bogalusa, Louisiana, and the city of Vicksburg, Mississippi, haunted by a terrible siege in the American Civil War.

Susan recalled a frightening visit from the Klu Klux Klan (KKK), the white supremacist group. Newt had invited an African American employee home after work and was told: we know that you are new,



you are Jewish, but we don't do that here".

Susan is survived by her younger sisters Jill and Anne, her mother Irene, and a large

extended family. She is also profoundly missed by many friends and supporters of BODHI. (see also page 4)

**"Susan is very popular among the Chakma people. Whole Chakma people will mourn if they know it".**  
Kulottam Chakma

# The birth and the future of BODHI

## Two weeks in 1985

I was very fortunate to meet Susan, for one hour only, at a Buddhist guesthouse in Shanti Niketan (Abode of Peace), New Delhi, in late 1985. This was during the Hindu festival of Diwali, which signifies the triumph of light over darkness.

By then, Susan was working in a creative role in Hollywood, for a TV station. She had discovered Buddhism, and was on pilgrimage with fellow students of Geshe Tsultrim Gyeltsen (including now BODHI director Dr Marty Rubin). Geshela had founded Thubten Dhargye Ling, a centre for Buddhist studies in Los Angeles. In 1991, it would be Geshela who married us.

I remember the fortnight when I first met Susan very well. Two days before our meeting I had talked in Dharamsala for half an hour with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In that interview he encouraged me in my wish to work to improve health in India.

Susan and I met the Dalai Lama twice more, most significantly in 1990, when we had a long meeting to discuss BODHI, which we had co-founded the previous year. That meeting was also in Dharamsala. (There is a photograph of the three of us on the BODHI website (<http://bodhi.net.au/html/foundingpatron.html>))

## The birth of BODHI

I started to develop the idea for BODHI in the early 1980s, when planning a year of study of "Third World" health problems that I was undertaking in 1985. In preparing for that I had searched for a Buddhist-influenced NGO to volunteer for. Unable to find one (not then knowing of the Taiwan-originated charity

Tzu Chi or Karuna in the UK) I had instead spent electives (as a medical student) with Christian missions in Nigeria and with the Britain Nepal Medical Trust, whose focus was then on reducing the high burden of tuberculosis in eastern Nepal.

From then I had mentioned the idea of a Buddhist-influenced development and health organization to a few people. In 1988, I travelled to Rumtek monastery, Sikkim, with Dr Helena Miksevicius, to explore setting up a health clinic there. That did not work, mainly because the Indian government appeared to develop the idea that we were spies! Helena was sympathetic to Buddhists being actively engaged with health and development, but neither I nor her thought we could at that time start a whole new organisation.

However, in the next year I saw Susan again. She was immediately enthusiastic about BODHI (though we did not have the name then). Later, we were joined by two of Susan's friends (Dr Marty Rubin and Scott Trimmingham) and then by the late Dr Denis Wright, who Susan had met in her studies of Asian art and religion, at the University of New England, Australia. The boards of both BODHI Australia and BODHI US were then established, and did not change until after Susan's diagnosis. I deeply appreciate their willingness to help, at a time when our track record was so slim.

By late 1989 Susan and I were living in the small Tasmanian city of Devonport, where I was working as a general practitioner. We wrote to His Holiness asking him to be our patron. To our joy, he agreed. The letter advising us of this arrived on the last mailing day (no email then) of the 1980s. We started the 1990s full of hope.

## The future

Susan worked at least 20 hours for BODHI, almost every week from mid-1989 until her diagnosis with stage IV pancreatic cancer in April 2014. While enduring chemotherapy, Susan spent part of her limited energy on BODHI, including chairing her final AGM (see page 4).

Susan's time and many skills are completely irreplaceable by any one person. She did the banking, much of the record keeping, and she also tended the website, something I currently have very limited skill at. She edited this newsletter, co-developed projects, assessed proposals & inspected budgets. She corresponded extensively with numerous people vital to BODHI's work, mainly in India and in Bangladesh.

Susan's premature death, the inspiration of her life, and the outpouring of grief at her loss have been very touching and motivating, not only to the surviving directors, old and new, but to many other people. Already, over A\$6,000 has been donated in her memory, mostly by first-time donors. We also have three new BODHI Australia directors.

## A project in memory

We will start a new project in Susan's memory, based in Pune. I am attending the World Congress on Public Health, in Kolkata this February. En route I will visit Pune, which I last went to in 2005, to consolidate plans that are now evolving in consultation with Karunadeepa.

I hope also to again visit Mainpuri, Uttar Pradesh, to meet again with Suresh Bauddha, the driving force behind the Youth Buddhist Society (see BODHI Times 37 and 40). While there, in Sankissa, I hope to again meet with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who will be giving teachings near where the Buddha passed at least one rains retreat, so long ago.

# Climate Change and Global Health: WHO meeting

I attended, by invitation, a conference on climate change and health, organised by the World Health Organization (WHO). The immigration officer was unusually friendly. What kind of conference is it? When I said it was about climate change he said "Good, you tell them, tell them about Maurice Newman and the others". He was lamenting how influential Australian figures, self-taught on climate change, expound their views to national audiences, asometimes unchallenged by hapless hosts, and unfairly influence national policy, from carbon disinvestment to the Australian renewable energy target.

WHO paid the flight carbon offsets, making this the first carbon-neutral conference in its history. More people than expected attended – 360, including several health and environment ministers (though few from powerful countries). Geneva diplomacy was evident; ultra-deference to some, and the lines that separate what can be said from what cannot be said.

The philosopher Habermas has described "critical-emancipatory" knowledge, as "geared to challenging the status quo and creating a world predicated on new (or existing yet currently unrealized) ideals". In some ways, the conference reflected this; in other ways, it seems to have reinforced old habits. Many delegates called for an end to fossil fuel subsidies, for technological leapfrogging, and for a fairer world. But I was less convinced of appreciation of global inequalities, of limits to growth, and of more radical steps such as carbon disinvestment and civil disobedience. "No go" areas included how climate change might aggravate the

risk of large-scale conflict, migration and famine. The development-hindering role of rapid population growth was off the table. The final day included a session on the economics of climate change, presented by the New Climate Economy project. There is a detailed summary on the web – including nine pages of the WHO Bulletin. The background paper Strengthening Health Resilience to Climate Change repeated the three tier classification of health effects in the IPCC health chapter. My now-released edited book (Climate Change and Global Health) also uses a three way structure, an earlier version of which has been cited in a revised version of this paper. WHO deserves great credit for its leadership in this vital area.

## Australia's coal frenzy

In November 2014 I was arrested, to express my opposition to the aggressive expansion of coal exports. I face a maximum jail term of 7 years.

## Three New Directors

Readers will recall that in 2012 we lost another BODHI Australia director to cancer, Dr Denis Wright. Aware of her prognosis, Susan and I successfully sought the expansion of BODHI Australia's board, recruiting Dr Julie Adamson, a paediatrician and adolescent physician who based in Newcastle, Australia (known to me since 1980); Dr Indira Samarawickrema, a public health doctor originally from Sri Lanka who has been an advisor to BODHI since 2013; and Dr Marty Rubin, a psychiatrist living in California, who has been a director of BODHI US since 1991. We are also exploring ways to expand the BODHI US board. And we have to (at least temporarily and with regret) suspend several projects.

## Thank you

Prof Adrian Sleight, ACT Aust  
Drs Anna Olsen, Ashwin Swaminathan, ACT  
Aryadharma, NSW, Aust  
Prof Bob Douglas, ACT, Aust  
Emilia Della Torre, ACT, Aust  
Gary Corr, ACT, Aust  
Gina Woodhill and her yoga classes  
Dr Jane Keble-Williams, Tas, Aust  
Dr Joan Corbett, ACT, Tas  
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Prof Lenore Manderson, Vic Aust  
Dr Peter & Wendy Tait, ACT, Aust  
Drs Richard & Victoria von Witt, Tas, Aust  
Ric & Jo Easton of Bio-Distributors, Tas, Aust  
for loyal, much-valued support  
Tenzin Dao and Tenzin Yeshe, ACT, Aust  
Tom and Merrily Bliss CA, US  
Tzu Chi Australia  
Prof Val Brown, ACT Aust  
Victoria Scott, CA  
The Woldenberg family, US  
Other donors in Susan's memory  
Over 200 other people with short tributes to Susan, many on Facebook  
Our many other regular and occasional donors, some of whom wish to remain anonymous

## We (still) need your help

Your loyal and generous support allows us to continue helping the voiceless, the dispossessed and the forgotten. Thank you.

Australian cheques are tax-deductible if made out to "BODHI Australia Overseas Relief Fund." All U.S. checks are tax-deductible. This is for Aust'n and US taxpayers respectively.

### Founding Patron His Holiness XIV Dalai Lama 1989 Nobel Laureate for Peace

Medical Director Prof Colin Butler, BMed., PhD  
Co-founder Susan Woldenberg Butler

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## More on Susan

### Writing and editing

Susan had a rich life. Since her passing, I have been trying to focus on the truth that Susan lived, not that she has died. As well editing 46 of these newsletters, she wrote a trilogy of insightful stories about the foibles of patients and doctors. Two have so far been published, *Secrets of the Black Bag* and *Black Bag Moon*. The final in this trilogy, *Black Bag Fix*, is undergoing a final edit. Two publishers may be interested, including the Royal College of General Practitioners, who published her first book. Her work has been likened to A. J. Cronin, whose many books formed the basis for the TV series "Dr Finlay's Casebook", broadcast on the BBC from 1962 until 1971. Susan deeply appreciated this compliment.

Susan has two other unpublished books, including *The Aftback Chronicles*, which reveals the secret lives of stuffed animals, some of whom are heroic but neurotic. Many of my articles and slides, were improved by Susan's input. She self-published four booklets, two of them cookbooks from the heart of Tasmania. Susan was also a trustee of the Clifford Craig Research Trust.

### Last word from Susan

June 22 2014. BODHI Australia's Annual General Meeting in Canberra had a wonderful turnout on a nippy winter Sunday with a sky of prisms and shimmering beauty visible through the old wood-framed windows of the meeting room kindly lent to us by the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University. Attending included Drs Sue Wareham, who took minutes, Gillian Hall, Indira Samarawickrema, and Gilles Rohan, as well as Marty Rubin via Skype. Representing



**Balwadi children & carer, Pune**

**Rebecca Rubin reports:** First and foremost, I would like to thank and dedicate this article to Susan Butler, without whom I would not have had the incredible opportunity to work with and learn from so many courageous women during my time in India (early 2014). When I first asked to get involved with BODHI and do volunteer work in India, Susan arranged for me to go to Pune and work with Bahujan Hitay Pune Project (Jeevak). Jeevak works in the slums of Dapodi to promote children's education, healthcare, and vocational training for women. The non-profit is run by women and for women, with projects designed to support widows, mothers, and other women who wish to be self-sustaining. Dalit (untouchable) women have the additional burden of prejudices because of their low caste stand-

youth were Indira's daughter and son Anjuni and Aswin Pieris. Volunteers Gerry and Brian Warren and Charles Mason were also there as were Luiz Ribiero, Devin

ing. I worked with Karunadeepa Wankhede who overcame much prejudice as a dalit, to become an educated and remarkably selfless mother, wife, and friend. She dedicates her life to support women who have less than herself, working tirelessly with the staff to host 40+ women's health events, self-esteem workshops, vocational training classes, micro-financing groups, and more. Another woman I worked with was Shantida, who was kind enough to allow me to stay with her and her son while I was there. Shantida is also a dalit who never had the opportunity to pursue an education. By the end of my 4 months, I had formed strong relationships, sometimes through unspoken language, with all the women there. I am grateful to have learned and been touched by so many and for all the work that continues to be done in Pune.

Bowles, Colin and Susan. There was much momentum to discuss. Reports were given and accepted, but discussion also touched Susan's diagnosis and how this would affect BODHI.

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