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The
Last Breath
with Ajahn Pasanno



The Last Breath

ISBN 974-218-282-5

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All Paintings by Jaturun Siripongs (Jay)

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Foreword



The Buddha encouraged us to develop mindfulness of death with the consideration, "Oh, were I to live just for the time of breathing in after the out-breath or breathing out after the in-breath, I would direct my mind on the Blessed One's teaching. Much, indeed, could then be done by me!" The Buddha commended those who contemplate in this way, saying that they "live diligently, and that they

develop mindfulness of death ardently for the destruction of the underlying defilements.” (A.8.73)



Our lives tend to lead us into entanglements and pre-occupations that leave us without the clarity of mind and heart to deal wisely with the details of our day to day lives, let alone to face death with clarity and equanimity or to arouse the sense of urgency the preceding quote encourages.





The following story is of a person who was able to utilise the adverse circumstances of incarceration on Death Row in San Quentin Prison and develop the inner resources to face his death with courage, grace and compassion. I had the good fortune to be invited to act as spiritual advisor for his final days. Not having met him before I was not sure what sort of person I would be meeting, but it was a delight to meet Jay and to share in his last days. He set an



example from which all of us could find something to learn.



I would like to thank Mrs. Mesa Kasemsarn for making this article available. May the blessings of this offering bring peace and happiness to many.

*Pasanno Bhikkhu (co-abbot)
Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery
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California*



..... Jay used art to express his process of growing and changing. He often used butterflies as a symbol of his metamorphosis. At some time during his incarceration, he had realized that his life would end in prison. He thought, I can't continue hating myself or others.

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*"Is there anybody you have
not forgiven yet?"*

Jay thought about it.

*"I haven't forgiven myself
completely,"*

he said softly at last.

The Final Days
of
"Jay Siripongs"





JATURUN “Jay” SIRIPONGS,

a native of Thailand, was convicted in 1983 for the murders of Garden Grove market owner Pakawan “Pat” Wattanaporn and store clerk Quach Nguyen. While Siripongs admitted to involvement in the robbery, he denied having committed the murders. Yet he refused to name his accomplice and was convicted and sentenced to death.

Six days before Jay Siripongs was to be executed, his friend, attorney Kendall Goh, contacted Abhayagiri Monastery seeking a Buddhist spiritual

advisor. Two days later, Abhayagiri co-abbot Ajahn Pasanno expeditiously received security clearance to enter San Quentin Prison and spent three extraordinary days with Jay Siripongs, the last three days of Siripongs' life. Jay Siripongs died by lethal injection on February 9, 1999.

There were many reports that Siripongs went through a remarkable spiritual transformation while in prison.

As a youth, Siripongs had taken temporary Buddhist monastic ordination in Thailand – a common Thai cultural practice. While in prison, he

drew upon the meditation training he had received during his ordination and practiced consistently. Guards and inmates alike recognized that he lived his life at San Quentin peacefully. Several guards supported the clemency appeal for Siripongs, some openly. Even former San Quentin warden Daniel B. Vasquez supported a plea for commutation of Siripongs' sentence to life imprisonment.

Kathryn Guta and Dennis Crean spoke with Ajahn Pasanno in May 1999.

Fearless Mountain* : How did you come to be called in as Jay Siripongs' spiritual counselor?

Ajahn Pasanno: The first time Jay expected to be executed was November 17, 1998. At that time, he was accompanied by a Christian minister, a woman who had attended several other executions at San Quentin. Although Jay liked the minister very much and had known her for years, there was a dynamic between them that increased his anxiety. In November, in the final hours

* *Fearless Mountain (FM)* is a monastery publication.

before his scheduled death, the two talked incessantly, and Jay was distracted from composing his mind. Jay had had a clear sense of what he needed to do in order to prepare for death, but he did not do it in November. Then, at the last moment, a federal court granted a stay, and Jay was not executed for another three months. He was very fortunate that this first execution had been stayed. His situation and reactions became clear to him. He wanted to make his death as peaceful as possible, and he knew he had to do the inner work to make it so.

For the second execution date, Jay was determined to go to his execution alone so that he could try to be calm and collected in his last hours. His friend Kendall Goh was concerned about his lack of spiritual support and offered to find a Buddhist advisor. It was apparently not easy for Jay to ask for a different spiritual advisor; he encountered difficulties both from San Quentin and others, and he was cautious. I thought that his caution was reasonable, as clearly the last thing he needed at that stage was some pious lecture from a monk. However, imme-

diately after we met we connected, and he was happy to have me there.

FM: *How did it feel to serve as a spiritual counselor to a condemned man?*

AP: *At first, I felt happy to help. Then I thought, I'm going into a hell realm, and there was a certain amount of trepidation. There were gates, chains, a metal detector and guards. Then there was a second metal detector, guards to stamp my hand after I'd cleared it, then more gates and guards. Yet there were also many conflicting images. I heard a guard call children visitors by their names as if he knew them.*

When I saw Jay, he was not like others I have been with who are approaching their deaths. Jay was young and healthy, in control of his faculties. He was sharp, intelligent and talented. It was clear he had lived the last years of his life skillfully. Although he was waist-chained, he remained dignified. He was gracious and hugged his visitors. The whole situation took on a surreal quality. Everything appeared normal, but at midnight on Monday this human being would die, he would be executed.

FM: *Was there any tension in the air*

considering that Jay would soon be put to death?

AP: *Not really. The atmosphere was relaxed and not gloomy. Sometimes we got down to the nitty gritty of the mind. Other times we joked and laughed. On the first day especially, Jay was a very gracious host. Prior to my arrival he had set up a chair for me on one side of a table and for his friends on the other side. He had instructed them very strictly on how to behave in the presence of a monk, and he had planned to offer a meal. He said it was the first time he had been able to feed a monk*

in twenty years. In response to questions from his friends, I talked about the Buddhist theory of awakening using the lotus flower metaphor. I also talked quite a bit about the meaning of Taking Refuge – seeing the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha as enlightened knowing, truth and the embodiment of goodness. Jay was so happy that his friends could hear Dhamma and that he could share this with them.

Yet I felt very concerned that Jay look after the quality of his own mind and not let people distract him due to their own traumas about his im-

minent death. Jay recognized the dynamic that was going on around him; he was certainly not trying to maintain social contact because of agitation or restlessness. Still, he realized that he had to take responsibility for his own stability. Although he gave himself completely to his friends during the visiting hours, he meditated many of the other hours of the day beginning when he awoke at two or three o'clock in the morning.

During the days before his death, I pushed Jay into not becoming distracted. He had a lot of visitors. I told him it's best not to get too caught up

with all these people. Kendall had told me when I first came that Jay was doing fine, that it was the rest of them who were falling apart. It was very obvious that Jay had touched the lives of many people, and they gathered around him before his death. His sister, Triya, was there. Some of his friends considered him their spiritual teacher. Many of his friends were lawyers, other friends were born-again Christians. So there were many different needs, and Jay, being kind-hearted and generous, tried to fulfill them all.

FM: *Is it true that Jay was also an ac-*

complished artist?

AP: *Yes. Jay showed me his portfolio. He had become skilled in many different media and was obviously talented. He also gave away most of his art – over 600 pieces – to acquaintances and friends over the years. **Jay used art to express his process of growing and changing. He often used butterflies as a symbol of his metamorphosis.** At some time during his incarceration, he had realized that his life would end in prison. He thought, I can't continue hating myself or others.*

During the last eight years, Jay

*underwent a deep transformation and came to a real understanding of himself. He told me that he had been in prison for a long time and couldn't say it was a bad thing. **He felt he had been able to grow in prison in a way that would not have been possible had he not been in such difficult and extreme circumstances.** He learned to reflect deeply on what would create well-being and clarity in his mind. The closer he got to the execution, the more **he learned about what would obstruct the mind from growth and peace.** He turned himself to the process of applying the*

mind to truth.

FM: *And this included taking up Buddhist meditation?*

AP: *That's right. Jay had learned how to meditate when he was a monk in Thailand many years earlier. While in the monastery, he had had a very clear vision of light while meditating, but when he had tried to replicate the experience, it didn't come back.*

FM: *That sounds like the common meditation experience of grasping after what is pleasant.*

AP: *Yes. I teased him about that. Jay*

then reported that three weeks earlier the light had come back. This was very encouraging to me. Since Jay was a visual artist, I realized that he could use the vision of light as an anchor at the moment of his death. I led him in guided meditations centering on the breath and light. Since his breath would only be there until the injection took effect, I told Jay that there would come a time to let the breath go and focus instead on the image of light.

FM: *How else were you able to help Jay with his inner work? Was he afraid of death?*

AP: *The first night we talked on the phone, I had asked Jay, "What's your mental state?"*

"I'm at peace," he said. "I've accepted what will happen. But I still have things I want to know."

*Growing up in Thailand, Jay believed in rebirth. He joked that he wanted his ashes scattered in the sea so that they might be eaten by fish and then the fish by humans. In this way, he could quickly return to the human realm to continue his work. **He knew that human birth was the place where learning was possible – a place to under-***

stand pain and joy, good and evil, right and wrong. Growth and understanding were the results of choices one made.

Jay had made some very bad choices over the years, but he had also made some good ones. He felt he had learned some real lessons in this lifetime and was determined to stay on the path of Dhamma in the next life.

FM: *Did you ever talk to Jay about those bad choices, about his crimes?*

AP: *No, I never talked to Jay specifically about the past. There was not enough time. I focused instead on his spiritual well-being and on his ability*

to face death with as composed a mind as possible. I was not relating to him as a person convicted of a crime, I was relating to him as a person facing death.

FM: *What were the last few hours with Jay like?*

AP: *Six hours before an execution, the prisoner leaves his family and friends behind and goes to a very cramped cell right next to the execution chamber. Only his spiritual advisor can accompany him. There are six guards, called the execution squad, in a very confined space, and people like the prison psychiatrist and the warden also*

come in from time to time. There can be a lot of intimidation from the guards right before the execution. They might be carrying on loud conversations or be obnoxious in other ways. They may be watching TV very loudly just three feet away from the condemned man. On Jay's November execution date he had been allowed recitation beads in his cell, but before giving them to him, one of the guards had put them on the floor and stepped on them.

After I was strip searched, I was taken to one of these death row holding cells. There, Jay and I were separated

into two different cells connected only by a small corner. Right away I did protective chanting as a way of cleaning out negative energy. "We'll take the game away from them," I told Jay. We had planned for Jay to ask for the Refugees and Precepts in Pali, but he mistakenly did the chant to request a Dhamma talk instead. So I gave a short Dhamma talk to him and the guards.

FM: *What did you talk about?*

AP: *I told the story of the Buddha, just after his enlightenment not wanting to teach, as he thought nobody would understand. I talked about the nature of*

delusion of the human world and the liberation of the Dhamma. I talked about the Four Noble Truths, about how letting go was not a rejection of anything. I instructed Jay to pay attention to the arising of consciousness, rather than inclining the mind towards that which will result in suffering and rebirth. I told Jay to move instead towards relinquishment and focusing the mind.

In terms of letting go or relinquishment, we talked about forgiveness in the context of “not self.” If we haven’t forgiven, we keep creating an identity around our pain, and that, is

what is reborn. That is what suffers. I asked Jay, "Is there anybody you have not forgiven yet?" I meant the system, his parents, others. Jay thought about it. "I haven't forgiven myself completely," he said softly at last. It was touching. He had a memory of being a person who had been involved in something wrong in the past, yet now in the present he was a different person. It was helpful for him to see that he was not this memory of himself, to let go of the person in the past who was involved in the crimes.

It was also interesting to see that

the guards seemed intent on what I was saying, and throughout the evening they were actually very solicitous and respectful of both of us.

FM: *Was Jay preoccupied with the numerous appeals to save his life that continued during this time?*

AP: *Jay did not seem concerned or worried about justice. He did not hold out great hope for the appeals to go through. When the final appeals were turned down, it was not a big deal. "I'm accepting the fact that I'll be executed," he said.*

FM: *What was Jay's state of mind as he*

got closer to the execution?

AP: *At one point, Jay asked, "If I am not the body, not the feelings, not the mind, then what is it that is liberated?" I told him that such a question appearing then in his mind was simply doubt arising.*

When you let go of everything and experience the peace and clarity inherent in that, you don't have to put a name or identity on it.

At another point Jay said, "I have two people on my mind,... me and you."

I said, "You've got to get rid of me. I'm not going in there with you.

And then you have to let go of yourself.” We really laughed about that.

Basically, I helped prepare Jay for the many distractions that might take place during the execution. “People will be strapping you down; things will be happening around you,”

I warned – “You need to establish the mind without going to externals. Keep your attention within.” We spent the whole evening meditating, chanting and talking Dhamma. So in the last hour Jay was very peaceful and able to establish his mind firmly on his meditation object. Toward the end, we

took the time to do a ceremony of sharing merit and offering blessings, even to the guards. After his final appeal had been turned down, Jay also asked me to do some chanting for the lawyers involved in his case. He had a quality of thoughtfulness right up until the end.

FM: *Were you present at the execution?*

AP: *No. That had been decided before I first visited Jay at San Quentin. I believe that not having yet met me, Jay elected not to have me there with him. When I read the papers the next day, though, they reported that he lay very*

still during the execution and kept his eyes closed. I found this heartening because I felt he was composing his mind.

FM: *How did you feel after the execution?*

AP: *I was very grateful to have been there. It was very humbling. One can't help but consider what any one of us would have done in a similar circumstance – relating to our death not as something abstract, sometime off in the future, but knowing that at precisely 12:01 A.M. we will definitely die.*

FM: *Was there a funeral for Jay?*

AP: *There was a private cremation the*

day after Jay died. I met with his sister, Triya, at the crematorium. Jay's body lay in a cardboard box. Earlier, when Triya had asked to view his body, she had been told by the funeral director that this was not possible. I wasn't aware of this, so I asked the funeral director to lift the lid to the box. With some hesitation, she lifted it. Jay was in a body bag. "There must be a zipper," I said. The woman searched around and said the zipper was by his feet. She hesitated again. She said that Jay would not be wearing any clothes. "There must be some scissors around. It's just a plastic

bag," I said. The woman brought some scissors over and cut the bag open at the shoulders and head.

It was very powerful to view his body. He had the most serene expression on his face. There was a brightness to his skin. He wasn't dull or waxy. He had the tiniest bit of a smile. It was very good to see he had died a peaceful death. After all that had happened, it was a reassuring ending.

A few months after the execution, I heard from a monastery supporter, whose friend is a psychologist working in the prison, that some

officials were deeply moved and felt uncomfortable to go back to their duties after Jay's execution. In a way, it is good to make them conscious.

After the event, I looked into the case, and from several pieces of information, I felt that Jay was not the murderer. However, all the time that he was in prison, he never said who the real murderer was, hence accepting the circumstances himself.

When Jay first went to court, he had no money to fight the lawsuit. His English was still poor. The lawyer appointed by the court was occupied

with campaigning for an election. Therefore, he did not pay enough attention and did not find witnesses for Jay. The court passed on judgment in a very short time.

As a Thai citizen who has been imprisoned, the Thai Embassy should be of assistance, according to international laws. But the Embassy was not informed until after the death sentence was delivered. Even though there was an appeal, Jay had no chance of winning because, according to the law, the court would consider only the information available during the first trial.

*The case made many depressed and sad. **But Jay always said that nobody should feel so. We must believe in the principle of deeds (kamma). If it is not the kamma of this life, it must be that of the past life. We should accept it with a peaceful mind. If we feel miserable we will be entangled with it again in our next lives. It can be seen as a chance to terminate this kamma.***



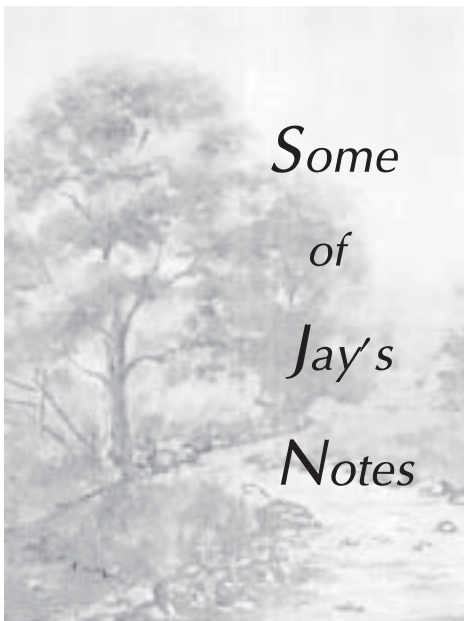
Last night's sleepless mind explained this well,
But what sounds ease the heart when petals freeze?

Leave treatises and poems, leave ink and brush,
Leave fall's last flowers. Leave the S.Q.'s walls
What I knew of gardens, or old texts,
Lies dead with my ambitions my lost past.

Ride out past quick-sprung poplars, white-
barked-pines
Past farmer's shacks - and past more sorrow blooms

Yet no road quits self-pity, outruns sorrow.
Better to stay and taste what's in the heart. —

Jay.



Some

of

Jay's

Notes

The following is a selection of writings of Jay's in which there are reflections and considerations on a variety of themes. The writings come from a series of journals which he wrote for a friend who was interested in Buddhism and meditation practice and with whom Jay shared some of his experiences and perspectives. It is not completely clear where and when Jay was using his own reflections and when he had found something from other sources which he is sharing. His writings were filled with themes for contemplation ranging from experiences in the world to refined areas of meditation training.



If you sincerely wish to practice, you have to let go of your terms and conditions. Profound teaching can be given only to those who really understand the value of that profoundness. In fact when you do understand the profoundness, many of your terms and conditions do not seem so important because they are much less valuable than the teachings. When a practitioner is able to let go, any teaching that is given is much deeper and has a more profound meaning.

So often we make something huge out of a simple problem, and blow it out of all proportion. How many of our difficulties start with one tiny misunderstanding: someone didn't give us their usual smile today, our teacher gave us a stern look or our best friend criticized us; this morning's cup of coffee was not so tasty; our mood was a bit cranky...that's all it takes to ruin our whole day!....How tragic this all is! For misunderstanding brings with it endless complications: hope and fear, despair and even suicide. WE make ourselves suffer, and WE create problems for our-

selves which are ABSOLUTELY unnecessary. It's that simple – all we have to do is realize it. And when you do eventually see the truth of just HOW unnecessary it is, your heart wants to burst with compassion for anyone who is suffering in this way. And yet at the same time you begin to appreciate the absurdity of it all.

Actually, I had no friends, by my definition, though many others call me friend. It was as if I had an invisible barrier around myself that kept all others at a certain distance. No one touched my heart and my heart was lonely. I

wished it could be otherwise, but the truth was that no one I knew when I was growing up was the type I cared to sincerely like and trust. Maybe I was just an intellectual snob, and I felt slightly guilty for that, but only slightly. If I ever encountered someone with really solid intelligence and integrity, someone I could truly admire for maintaining standards I myself could not, then maybe Suddenly, I can count more than my handful of friends (sic), and all I have had to do was letting go. Loneliness – no more.

Balance – Balance is essential to both meditation and daily living. Being too forceful and pushy only creates rigidity, stress, paranoia, and pain. Being too slack or lazy results in daydreams, delusions, and lack of focus and strength.

In meditation we give our full attention and energy to meditation, and in a way this takes effort. But we shouldn't feel strained, and in this way meditation is effortless. Like the guitar strings, we are tight but relaxed – in other words, alert but not straining. If we are lazy, our minds do not become

steady and calm. If we strain, we burn energy and end up grasping. Flexibility is the key to maintaining the balance of our minds in everyday situations.

In our relationships with other people, we need friendship and support, and we also need to be independent. People fall into extremes in how they relate to others. Many grown children blame their parents for emotional problems, or rebel against anyone in authority. We may need to understand our past, but blame does not bring freedom. If we get stuck in resentment and anger, we can build toxins inside our-

selves and cling to them in a way that harms us. See the past for what it is, then forgive and let go. This is the way to find peace.

Extreme self-reliance, the fear of relying on others can stunt our emotional and spiritual growth. Some people reject the idea of relying on anyone except themselves. But by being too proud or too fearful, they deny themselves the benefit of their own spiritual training. We need others to help make life less of a struggle. Support from family, friends, and community is very positive. At the same time, in our efforts to

grow emotionally and spiritually, we should proceed at our own pace and abilities, not according to someone else's timetable. In every circumstance, we can eventually find balance if we are calm and relaxed.

Compassion – *Be yourself, and expand your sympathies; touch with the tendrils of your consciousness the hearts of other human beings...Be kindly, refuse to hate. Let your heart expand. Pity and compassion are the proper feelings to cherish in respect to all erring humanity, and we must not give place to any other emotion, such as resentment, an-*

noyance, or vexation.

Courage – Do not be afraid of your difficulties, do not wish you could be in other circumstances than you are, for when you have made the best of an adversity it becomes the stepping stone to a splendid opportunity.No soul that aspires can ever fail to rise; no heart that loves can ever be abandoned. Difficulties exist only that in overcoming them we may grow strong, and only they who have suffered are able to save.

There is only one way – to know what one knows; and that is to risk one's convictions in an act, to com–

mit them in a responsibility – one does not know what one knows or even what one wishes to know, until one is challenged and must lay down a stake.

Humility – Be utterly humble and you shall hold to the foundation of peace. Where there is charity and wisdom, there is neither fear nor ignorance. Where there is patience and humility, there is neither anger nor vexation.

Harmony – Where the heart is full of kindness which seeks no injury to another, either in act of thought or wish, this full love creates an atmosphere of harmony, whose benign power

touches with healing all who come within its influence. Peace in the heart radiates peace to other hearts, even more surely than contention breeds contention.

Happiness does not need to be pursued or sought and is the free expression of life, which in the case of the human being is possible only when the workings of his nature, his mind, are unconditioned by its own past.

“We live happily indeed, not hating those who hate us!

We live happily indeed, free from greed among the greedy!

***We live happily indeed, though
we call nothing our own!***

***He who has given up both vic-
tory and defeat, he, the contented is
happy.”***

(Dhammapada)

*I have never been at all certain
of my identity. I used to think of myself
as some kind of rebel. A reluctance to
expend emotion. I was taught that ev-
ery pleasure has its price. I am always
fretting about consequences instead of
giving myself up totally to the present
moment.*

There was a time when I wished I could weep. How could I have been unfeeling? How could I have left my mother, my sister and my loved one? Increasingly, I had begun to suspect that I was unable to feel any emotion.

Twenty years rolled by like mist over the memories of my distant childhood in Thailand. Friendships were transitory, locales left behind. I was rootless and well-used to it and content(or so I thought). Here I am, wandering around in my self-pity, I feel like such an ass.


Then one day I do one thing, the same thing I've been doing for years

and years and the next day it's all different. I have been a hostage to my own insecurities and circumstances all my life. What've(sic) changed? Acceptance brought the change. Life's a lot easier if you can accept the inevitable.

In Buddhism, our teacher the Buddha taught a system that doesn't require blind faith from those who practice it. Rather, we are encouraged continuously to examine the teachings thoroughly. The Buddha presented the Buddha Dhamma in such a way that whether you are approaching it from the ordinary perspective of an unen-

*lightened person, or with the omniscient wisdom and awareness of an enlightened being – **the more you examine and scrutinize the Dhamma, the more benefit and value you find there, as well as more and more reasons for practicing it.***





The Letter
from
Michael

February 9, 1999

I lost a friend today. A man I have known just two months shy of 15 years. I called him my friend, but over the years he had become much more than that. Never have I let a man get as close to my family and friends as I did to him. Never once in all these years did I ever question his friendship or intentions. He never tried to use our friendship to his own advantage. Most people who know both of us would never think that we could be best friends, as we are total

opposite. Where I can be hard-headed, quick-tempered and loud, ready to use my fists to settle any problems, "Jay" was my total opposite.

I remember the first time I met him. It was April 2, 1984 and I had arrived a couple of days earlier and then moved into the cell next to him. I had just finished putting my few belongings away, when I heard a knock on the wall and a soft voice calling "Cell #1." I answered and he introduced himself, but told me to call him "Jay" as I probably couldn't pronounce his real name. He asked

if I needed anything and offered to send me some tea and cookies. We got to talking and he explained some of the rules to me. As we talked he told me that he was a native of Thailand.

I learned that his family was still in Thailand and I could tell that he missed them very much. I told him of my family and how lucky I felt as they were all close and they along with most of my friends had stuck by me.

In the days that followed I learned that "Jay" liked to paint and draw. At that time we were only allowed

to go out to yard 3 times a week for $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours at a time. This left us with a lot of spare time on our hands. Jay used to sit up late at night when the unit was quiet and draw or paint.

I quickly learned that he was also a good cook, and many nights he would call over and ask if I was hungry. He could take lunch meat, cheese, rice & beans from dinner or canteen and make a complete meal from it. He once asked me to save my ketchup packets from lunch for him. I never thought much about it until one day when he told me to try some of

his "hot" sauce on a sandwich he made for me. He warned me that it was hot, but as everyone in prison is used to putting "hot sauce" on all our food, just to give it some flavor, I didn't worry about his sauce being too hot. I learned that day what the true meaning of "hot" really is. After I finally managed to get my breath back, and I think invented a few new cuss-words no one had ever heard before, I had to get Jay to quit laughing. He had warned me, but I hadn't listened. From then on I learned to ask him what type of sauce was in everything he of-

ferred me.

Jay always offered to share whatever he may have and never asked for anything in return. You couldn't help but like him. He puzzled me. I had heard from other guys that he had been sent here for a robbery and double-murder. Trying to equate that kind of crime with this quiet little man was hard to do. Jay was not a big man in size. He was just a little over 5 feet tall and maybe 130 pounds soaking wet. The idea that this mild-mannered man had done a crime like that just didn't seem right. Jay hated

violence and wouldn't resort to violence, even to protect himself. It once happened that a guy who liked to prey on smaller men picked Jay as his target. One of our mutual friends told me what this guy was trying to do. I went to Jay and told him that I would handle it for him, as this guy wouldn't play his games with someone his own size. Jay told me not to, as he didn't want me to get into trouble because of him. I argued with him, and he finally told me that if I hurt this guy because of him, he would be mad at me. As usual, I did things my way, and true

to his word, Jay got mad at me. He didn't talk to me for almost two weeks and then when he did, he called me a bully and said it wasn't right for me to beat-up another guy over him. I tried to explain that to my way of thinking, friends looked out for and helped each other. He told me that, that is exactly what he was doing, looking out for me by trying to keep me out of trouble because of him. We both were doing the same thing, but in our own ways.

Jay was not a coward ! I never once saw him show any sign of fear, even

in a couple of situations where I was doubting just how safe our situation was. A program was started where some of the Death Row prisoners were given jobs as workers in the lock-up units. Both Jay and I got jobs in a cell-block that held all gang-members. The previous workers had been stabbed in that cell-block, Jay never once showed any fear and even though he was "tested" many times by various gang-members to see if they could threaten or scare him, he stayed working. He eventually earned the respect of the gang-leaders and they in turn told the

guys to leave Jay alone.

Over the years Jay made many friends. My family all know him and look upon him as a member of the family. Jerry & Elaine Roberts, friends of my family got to know Jay because I sent them a painting he had done. They came to look on him as a son.

Jay was a complex man. So intelligent, talented and easy-going, and always thinking of others, even when faced with his own death. Last December I got called for a visit. When I walked into the visiting room I saw Jay sitting with my

niece Christina. Jay had known her since she was four years old and used to play and talk with her all the time. As I walked up I could see tears in Christina's eyes. Jay told me something was wrong but that Christina wouldn't tell him what it was. He then left to go back to visit with his lawyer and I asked Christina what was wrong. She then told me that she had seen the news the night before talking about Jay's execution and she didn't know what to say or do any more to him. Jay came back over and asked what the problem was and I told him what she had said. He

hugged her and said, "just be my friend like always." Even then he was thinking of someone else, not himself.

Many things were said about Jay on T.V. and in the newspapers. I know that man ! Not once in 15 years did he ever lie to me, not even when he knew I might get mad at what he said. The only people who know what really happened the night of the crime Jay died for, are those who were there. I do know myself just how easily someone can get caught up in something they had no intentions of being a part of, just because of circum-

stances they had no control of. Few people know the hardships of Jay's life or the circumstances that put him in that situation that night. To Jay's family I would say this, "I have lived with and known some of the most vicious killers in history, Jay did not belong here. If someone tells me that Jay stole some money or food for him or someone else to survive, I would agree that might be possible, but never will anyone ever convince me that Jay would cold-bloodedly murder anyone for any reason. That just wasn't in his nature." A man can fake or lie to people,

but in 15 years I never once doubted that Jay fought to save those people that night.

Jay was my friend, my brother. I and my family will honor his memory. We will think of the good-natured man who gave so much to others, every time we look at the many paintings and drawings he did for all of us.

Sleep well brother, you'll be missed but never forgotten.

W/R

Michael



Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery is the first monastery in the United States to be established by followers of Ajahn Chah, a respected Buddhist Master of the ancient Thai forest tradition of Theravada Buddhism.

In 1995, as Venerable Master Hsuan Hua, abbot of the City of 10,000 Buddhas in Ukiah, California, approached his death, he instructed his disciples to deed over to Ajahn Sumedho, Ajahn Chah's senior Western disciple, 120 acres of forest, in Redwood Valley, fifteen miles north of the City of 10,000 Buddhas. The name "Abhayagiri" which means "Fearless Mountain" was chosen for this new monastery. Subsequently, an adjacent piece of land

with some buildings was purchased to make up the 250 acres of land that now comprise the Monastery.

Abhayagiri is a center of teaching and practice for people in monastic or lay life. Its heart is a community of monks (bhikkhus), nuns (siladharas), novices (samaneras), and postulants (anagarikas) pursuing a life of meditative reflection. Frequently monastics from the other branches of this global community come and stay for periods of time.

The Sangha lives according to the Vinaya, a code of monastic discipline established by the Buddha. In accordance with this discipline, the monastics are alms

mendicants, living lives of celibacy and frugality. Above all, this training is a means of living reflectively and a guide to keeping one's needs to a minimum: a set of robes, an alms bowl, one meal a day, medicine when ill, and a sheltered place for meditation and rest.

The Vinaya creates a firm bond between the Sangha and the general public. One reason for this is that without the daily offering of alms food, and the long-term support of ordinary people, the Sangha cannot survive. Obviously, the necessary support will only be forthcoming if the Sangha provides an example that is worthy of support. This relationship creates a frame-

work within which generosity, compassion and mutual encouragement can grow.

Dependence upon others encourages monastics to live in faith and be content with a humble standard of living. For those who support the Sangha, this opportunity to give provides occasions for generosity and a joyful and direct participation in the spiritual life. In return the Sangha offers people spiritual guidance by verbal teachings and by its living presence.

Venerable Ajahn Pasanno and Venerable Ajahn Amaro guide the Monastery as co-abbots.

Ajahn Pasanno is a highly respected and well-known Dhamma teacher. Ordained in 1973, he spent 23 years as a monk in Thailand, with the latter 15 years as the abbot of the International Forest Monastery (Wat Pah Nanachat). In April of 1995, he offered to help lead the new Monastery in California. His offer was enthusiastically received. Transferring his responsibilities for running Wat Pah Nanachat and various forest preservation projects took quite some time. Finally, he arrived in California on New Year's Eve 1996.

Ajahn Amaro began his training in the forest monasteries of Northeast Thailand with Ajahn Chah in 1978. He continued his training under Ajahn Sumedho at the newly established Chithurst Monastery in West Sussex, England. In 1985, he moved to the new "Amaravati Buddhist Centre" outside of London and helped with teaching and administration for ten years. He served as vice-abbot to Ajahn Sumedho for the last two of these years. In 1990, he began spending a few months each year teaching in San Francisco. In June of 1996, Ajahn Amaro moved to California to establish Abhayagiri Monastery.

D h a m m a p a d a



*We are what we think.
All that we are arises with our thoughts.
With our thoughts we make the world.
Speak or act with a pure mind
And happiness will follow you
As your shadow, unshakable.*



*The wise man,
By vigor, mindfulness, restraint, and
Self-control,
Creates for himself an island
Which no flood can submerge.*



*The wind cannot shake a mountain.
Neither praise nor blame moves
the wise man.*



*Happiness or sorrow –
Whatever befalls you,
Walk on
Untouched, unattached.*



*Surrendering oneself to Dhamma
leads to serene being.
The wise perpetually delight
in the truth taught by
the Awakened One.*



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