



The Third Life's a Charm

By Anne Trench



A goal for these interviews, meant to introduce individual sangha members, was to develop a memorable “tag line” for each person profiled. With that in mind, I asked Carla to complete this sentence: “Oh, Carla, she’s the one who…” Since I knew a bit about her, I thought Carla might say “… grew up in Brazil.” But something else tumbled out that suits her much better. “Carla’s the one who’s led three lives.”

Carla has indeed led three lives. The first was as a missionary kid who grew up in Brazil. As she explains it, being a missionary kid is akin to being an “army brat”—a life ordered by one’s father’s career. It involves lots of moves and a strong in-group solidarity. Carla’s dad was a pastor in a very conservative fundamentalist Christian church, and the move to Brazil was carefully planned, years in the making.

Of her years in Brazil, Carla says, “I loved the being-an-expat-living-in-Brazil part, but I hated the missionary-kid part.” Still, she tried hard to be a dutiful daughter, even after realizing at age 11 that she just didn’t believe as her parents did. “Though I adopted all the trappings of my hyper-religious community, there was nothing on the inside.” Her dutifulness extended to marrying the man selected by her family and community, a man she didn’t know particularly well or really care for. Eventually, her unhappiness in that relationship and in the world she grew up in led her out of her first life.

Carla’s second life began at age 35, when she packed up her car and her daughter and left her husband and everyone and everything she knew behind. She had only her carefully hoarded “running-away money,” and for the first time, she was truly on her own. She built a new life for herself in College Station, Texas, with a self-financed graduate education that led to a fulfilling career. She met Mike, the man she chose to be her husband.

Carla believes that, “If you need something, you just put it out there and let it rest.” When she was having a particularly difficult time, Mike, who had belonged to a Buddhist community elsewhere, suggested that Carla try meditation. She was intrigued, but it seemed unlikely that she would find a meditation class in conservative-small-town Texas. But she put it out there.

The very next week, at a local street fair, Carla began talking to an older woman who was sitting alone at a table with some flyers. That woman, Ann, was starting a meditation group. Ann followed the vipassana tradition. Carla says, “That’s what I needed, not Zen, not some other form.” Although Ann is now gone, the College Station meditation group still meets today.

Carla’s third life began taking shape during summers in Seattle with Mike, watching over the rental property where they now live. She loved Seattle and started going to “vacation Buddhist camp” at SIMS in 2005. As of July 2014, she is retired, living here permanently, and at SIMS year-round.

In her third life, Carla is refashioning the things she loved from her former lives. As a missionary kid, she loved helping others, especially women and children, and creating with her hands. Now she volunteers with Buddhist Global Relief and spends hours in the pottery studio at Seward Park. In her second life, she loved the stimulation of the academic world. Now she is immersed in the Spirit Rock Dedicated Practitioner's Program. As for the rest of her life, Carla says, "I'm still constructing it."