

AT KTD MONASTERY AND MAY'S WEDDING

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THE WEDDING

July 23, 2011

We are in a heat wave here in the mountains above Woodstock, day after day of 100 degree temperatures and we are up high. Down in Woodstock on "The Green" it is very much hotter.

It is hard to put into words all that has happened since I was last home. In fact I have not been home but have been away since July 13th. My son is home taking care of my dog Molotov, and understand he (Molly) is well. Let's start with the wedding:

I have three beautiful daughters and May is the second to be married. Although we had many names for her before she was married, the day of her birth in the month of May was so beautiful and her mom Margaret and I were so high from the whole thing, the flowers blooming all around, and so on... that we just called her "May." She has no middle name. May was ten pounds at birth. Anyway, back to the wedding...

May planned this wedding out to the nth degree, way more than I could have imagined. And it was not just the day of the wedding day itself that was sketched out. May wanted us up on the farm where the wedding was held days earlier so the two families could merge and spend time with one another and people drifted in from all over the country... and world. My dear friend Ngodup Burkhar, who has known May since she was one and a half years old came all the way from India. Ngodup translates for His Holiness the Karmapa, who is like the Dalai Lama, but the head of another Tibetan Buddhist lineage. In fact Ngodup also translated for the previous Karmapa, and so on.

And while Margaret and I were up on the farm, our home was filled with brothers and sisters, nieces and grandchildren, filling up the house.

When I got to the farm where the wedding was to be, some 18 people were already hard at work. I soon found out that no one was cooking for the crew and since I had run a restaurant (what a fiasco that was!) in the past I took over that task and was soon busy making breakfast, lunch, and dinner for 18.... 25.... people. The number kept climbing as the days ticked by. I had access to a large kitchen in a out-building and turned out a vast amount of breakfast potatoes, scrambled eggs and cheese, English muffins, OJ, and lots of coffee in the early morning coolness.

I did this for several days running. A huge tent was erected by a special crew. You could ride a bicycle in it, it was so big. A small fleet of trucks appeared to bring it. There were upward of 450 people at the wedding. It was a big wedding folks!

Many of the ladies spent their days making garlands of cut paper hearts and other symbols and these were strong throughout the tent along with endless strings of tiny lights. The guys did the heavy lifting. Acres of parking was corded off, golf carts whizzed around, and it had all the feel of a circus coming to town.

And toward the end, vast amounts of cut flowers arrived and every table had a gorgeous vase of really incredible flowers. I have photos, but no access to them right now here above Woodstock.

Well that is enough for today. I will try to gain Internet access in the next few days and write more about the wedding and then the visit of His Holiness the Karmapa.

Thanks to Wardo for this photo.



AT KTD MONASTERY – MAY'S WEDDING
July 24, 2011

Still hard to get to a computer here at the monastery and this computer is riddled with viruses that keep popping up, making posting difficult. I have been busy taking photos of His Holiness the Karmapa and entourage. Tomorrow he will speak to a large audience in Woodstock, New York. He has been nicknamed the "Green Buddha," because of his interest in the planet and environmental causes. The Karmapa's public talk in Woodstock will be an historic occasion. The Karmapa, like the Dalai Lama, is the head of one of the great lineages of Tibetan Buddhism.

Meanwhile more on the wedding. The days leading up to the event were days filled with intense activity. There was the parking to lay out, the long line of Portapotties, the vast assortment of flowers to be arranged, and on and on. By the Thursday before the Saturday wedding, more and more folks were pouring in and tents, popups, and even an old school bus were dotting the landscape. There was excitement in the air.

My daughter and her fiancé are part of Earthwork Music, a large collective of musicians that support and work closely with one another. Michigan is a primary hub in the U.S. for new music and this group of twenty-something-years old is remarkable for the quality of the music and the closeness of the sharing and mutual support. The farm where the wedding was held is also the location of the Harvest Gathering, a wonderful event held on the third weekend in September and attended by some 80+ bands, with three stages for three days of non-stop music. Aside from hundreds of musicians, this private gathering (not so private lately) assembles several thousand people for three days of music, food, and fellowship. Really, it is for musicians only, but others are welcome. It is the closest thing to the 1960s that I have experienced and hugging is mandatory here.

There was some concern as to what the father of the bride would wear and being an old hippie

it was hard to get me into anything like a suit. I finally succumbed to a tie and cotton vest, but that is where I drew the line. Father of the bride or not, I am what I am. May said I looked good, so that is what matters.

The actual ceremony included vows written by Seth and May themselves, and said with the deepest sincerity. There was not a dry eye to be found. I was so proud when May thanked Margaret and me for raising her as we did, home-schooled, and free to be creative as she wished. And she did wish.

After the ceremony, a New-Orleans-style brass band led the newly-wed couple and the rest of us on a long march from the open field of the ceremony to the Big Tent where all the events were held. I will try to write more tomorrow.



INTO THE NIGHT
July 25, 2011

Today, Monday, is the last day of our stay here at KTD (Karma Triyana Monastery) on Mead's Mountain above Woodstock, NY. This afternoon His Holiness the Karmapa will give a public talk down in Woodstock and I believe this will be an historic event. The Karmapa, like the Dalai Lama is the head of one of main sects of Tibetan Buddhism. He is 26 years old. When I return home I will begin to retell of my time here with His Holiness and I have many hundreds of photos of which you will see some of the best. Meanwhile, back to the wedding which in the blur of His Holiness' visit seems so long ago now.

The celebration of the event began right after the vows and went on all day and far into the night. The huge tent was T-Shaped and at the center of the "T" was a raised bandstand which was rigged with professional audio so that every note could be heard. Keep in mind that that vast majority of the 450 folks in attendance were musicians, so music was central to the festivities.

Musicians came from all over the country to play for May & Seth. In fact, a well-known act from Woodstock (Mike & Ruthie) came all the way from Woodstock to play a single song for May. All of the seventeen acts that presented that afternoon played but one song, but each was a bit of perfection and the audience wrapped around the stage on three sides.

What can I say? The music was priceless and the audience rapt. Couple this with various short toasts to the couple made this a rare and close event. Margaret and I led off the toasts,

welcoming everyone to the farm, thanking Seth's dad Bob Bernard and his partner Susannah for hosting the event, and so on. I recounted my experience of first meeting Seth and how he sang love songs to May from the stage, etc., and as May's dad put the scrutiny on him and caved in to his presence.

My friend Ngodup Burkhar (translator for His Holiness the Karmapa) had come all the way from India to the wedding. He too gave a toast and then proceeded to hand out dozens of large Katahs (the silk scarves offered as greetings by Tibetans) to family, friends, and many of the musicians. These were huge scarves with the eight auspicious symbols in full color on them. Throughout the afternoon the stage was filled with musicians with these colorful scarves draped around their necks and shoulders.

All of this was punctuated with appetizers, drink, and incredible food by a professional chef and crew from up near the Traverse City area of Michigan. There was a full taco bar and all kinds of stuff with Cherry Cobbler for desert with whipped cream and so on. Of course, there was also a wonderful wedding cake baked by my daughters lotis and Anne.

After the wedding songs and the food, the roots band "Steppin' in It" settled in to play for the evening and I guess there were other bands, but by that time I guess I was asleep. I danced with my daughter May on that first dance and then with my wife... and then with my daughter Ann and then... I was just dancing. Later in the night Margaret and I danced to some slow tunes when the bands finished and a mixed tape took over.

How high and happy were we? Words cannot express how far out there or in there we got. May had orchestrated this event beyond any elaboration or embellishment I could add here.... to take us to a place I believe no one present had ever been to... at least that is what many folks stated.

I was up very late.... very late for me. In the morning we had a huge brunch for family and any of those who spent the night or came back from motels and resorts where they had stayed for the night. Right after the brunch, about 1 PM, Margaret, my dear friend Ngodup, my daughter Anne, and myself jumped into the car, armed with some P&J and cheese sandwiches and hit the road, heading for Woodstock, NY and our visit with His Holiness the Karmapa. There is no way that any event other than seeing His Holiness in person could match the wedding as an event.

We had to drive all night, some 13 hours, and arrived in Woodstock sometime around 2 AM. When I get home I will continue this story.

