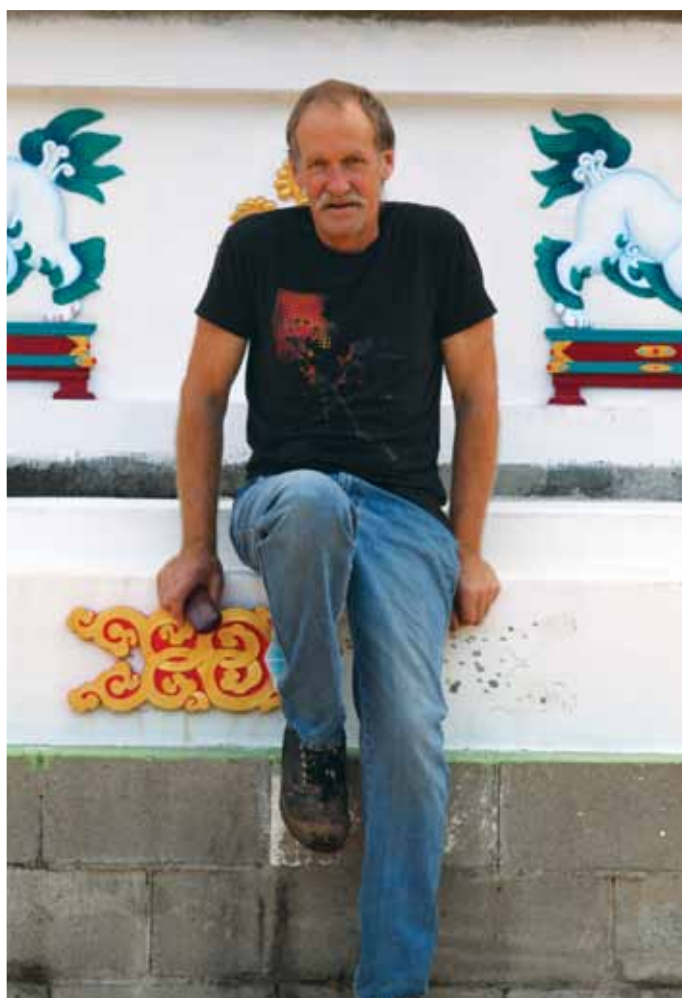


look at me

# growing with a garden

words leigh robshaw photos kate johns



Garrey Foulkes has volunteered 17 years of his life to building the Garden of Enlightenment at the Chenrezig Institute for Buddhist Studies in Eudlo.

NOW, AS A REWARD he would never have expected, just as it nears completion, the garden has been chosen as the place that will host the Dalai Lama's address to the Sunshine Coast on June 16.

A straight talker with a dry sense of humour, Garrey is not one to beat his own drum. The most you'll get out of him about the Dalai Lama visiting what is essentially his life's work is this: "It's like a huge cherry on the cake – it's fantastic."

He would rather emphasise the role Chenrezig plays in the community in helping people find happiness in their lives, whether Buddhists or not.

"I think it's just very important to put the whole thing under an umbrella of what Chenrezig can do to benefit the local community rather than make it about 'Garrey's extraordinary achievement,'" he says. He also points out the garden is simply a stepping stone leading to the Dalai Lama's visit to the coast, and that he is not coming primarily to consecrate the garden.

"That will happen, but it's not the reason he's coming," he says. "The reason is we have a very vibrant teaching program that a whole lot of people have been working their butts off for 40 years

to achieve. To an extent, we've grown up and it feels like blockages have been cleared away."

Garrey acknowledges Lama Zopa Rinpoche, the spiritual director of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, to which Chenrezig belongs, for having sent many invitations to the Dalai Lama to visit the institute.

"It's very rare for His Holiness to visit specific centres, so it's a very great honour, and I think it means something very important and significant for the whole region," he says.

Of the 3500 people who will attend, 500 will be year 11 and 12 students from Sunshine Coast state, independent and religious schools.

Lama Zopa supplied the original plan for the garden, however it has evolved organically as people have contributed ideas, with questions answered by the mother centre in Nepal in order to retain authenticity.

Originally an artist who took up building, Garrey along with his wife Krissie became interested in Tibetan Buddhism in the 1970s, and lived at Chenrezig for ten years, where they raised two daughters. Garrey says he put his hand up for the garden project without "the vaguest idea it would take this long".

"I probably wouldn't have done it if I'd known it would take nearly 18 years, but I'm hugely grateful it has happened that way. It's been an extraordinary opportunity. When you make a commitment to do something, whether it's write a book or have a child, you know in your mind if you back out of that you're a bit of a wimp and you've let people down including yourself."

The garden initially got off to a slow start due to lack of funds, so organisers decided to raise money by supplying stupas for people to put their loved ones' ashes under, effectively making it into a memorial garden. (Stupas are spiritual monuments representing the Buddha's enlightened mind, filled with texts and precious relics.)

"It was a bit difficult in the beginning. We were selling off the plan, trying to convince people it would be beautiful and would be finished one day, but people had nothing to see," he says.

Today, it is a sight to behold, with tranquil gardens featuring winding paths and Buddha statues, traditional Tibetan artworks and a multitude of stupas.

"I have to be honest and say there were ups and downs and times when it was difficult to keep heartened and not to get negative towards people who I felt should have been helping but weren't," says Garrey. "From a Buddhist point of view, that's considered a great opportunity to develop your practice, to have enemies or people who frustrate you to work with."

"On a happier note, it's a project that has involved hundreds of other people and tens of thousands of hours of people's time. It has given large numbers of people the opportunity to create merit for the future, which is very important from a Buddhist point of view."

Garrey says at least ten people have been consistent physical or financial helpers since the project began, and another 30 have contributed to a lesser extent. The project has come at a high personal cost to Garrey and Krissie, having had a significant impact on their social and financial lives.

"Krissie has displayed incredible patience over the years," says Garrey. "Most partners would have clubbed me to death!"

Having said that, Garrey's attitude to his chosen path and the personal fulfillment it has brought him speaks volumes about the integrity of his Buddhist principles.

"If you spend half your time working and you drive a Holden, and the other half of your time working as a volunteer creating some sort of merit, you have to weigh that up against not doing any voluntary work at all in order to drive a Mercedes. To me, that's no deal."

"To others, they want to get the biggest and best before they die. It's like people who work for Meals on Wheels or work in hospices; they get more joy out of life than people who drive expensive cars and go to restaurants six nights a week. It's simple: they're helping people." ☐

**Visitors are welcome at Chenrezig Institute from Wednesday through to Sunday; drop in for a teaching or some meditation time and make sure your visit includes a sweet Chai and vegetarian meal at The Big Love Café.**

**Chenrezig Institute hopes to receive assistance from the Sunshine Coast Council and other local organisations to help make the upcoming visit of the Dalai Lama a success. If you would like to become involved, please contact the Institute on 5453 2108 or visit [chenrezig.com.au](http://chenrezig.com.au)**

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