

Done with the Detour

By Mary Grace Lentz

Mary Grace has been studying and practicing the Dharma for over fifteen years, and has come to the Abbey many times. She is a teacher, wife, mother (of Jasmine and Emma), and grandmother (of Lily). After a recent retreat she wrote to describe the change that has happened inside of her.

My life has changed. It is hard to explain, but after my last visit at the Abbey, there was a part of me that said, "There is no going back."

Every time I return from the Abbey my practice deepens, but this time I felt the beginning of true renunciation. Retaking the five precepts made a lasting imprint. I notice this most while dedicating at the end of the day, when I reflect and rejoice on another day of keeping precepts. What is so beautiful, is that I'm still "mom", "nana" and keeper of the household - no pretense. I look at my family and think, "How wonderful it would be if they all were to realize the wisdom that understands emptiness!" And the way for them to realize this is for me to practice. Really practice. Morning, afternoon, evening and in between. While scrubbing the pots, I purify. Taking care of crying Lily, I reflect on all women who do not have help with their children. Being with Emma and her friends while they listen to the latest music, I watch my judging mind. I look for the opportunity to discuss with the girls the lyrics, and the implications of the words in a social and political context. While driving, I think about emptiness and the interdependence of everything I see - the car, the people, the billboards, the lights. I look for ways to help people. The latest small act is stopping at the bus stop and asking people if they need a ride, or checking in with the neighbors and delivering food, or even just petting my old dog Luna for a long time to ease her pain. I see the importance of kindness and the importance of cushion time.

It is as if I have finally found the right medicine for my ailment. The distracted mind is quieter, the "what if" mind is quieter, the "who do you think you are?" mind is quieter, the "I'm too busy with work and family" mind is quieter. There is nothing else to do. I can erase all the engagements on my calendar except for work and family, and fill the in-between with practice. Going to this workshop and that workshop for all my hobbies will not lead me to my goal. There is a new question that I ask myself before starting to do something: "Is this action going to get me closer to deepening my aspirations for bodhicitta and enlightenment?" I used it today at the drug store, while reach to buy a candy bar. I bought it and gave it away. I really enjoyed that candy bar - the best one I ever had. I used this question when Emma was sick and woke me up during the night to ask for some tea. Instead of saying "Go back to sleep, you'll feel better in the morning," I made the tea and dedicated.

I no longer have the excuse that "Since I'm not a monastic, I'm not really practicing." Life is practice...for the next left. I created the causes for my present life, so without whining about my misfortune or gloating over my fortune, I just need to get on with Dharma practice. Thank you for being there when I wasn't, and for relentlessly showing the path. I can honestly say that I'm done with the detour.