

The Bodhi Stand



Introducing Magdalena Lim

At Gold Buddha Monastery in Vancouver, if something needs to be done, whether it's running errands, solving maintenance problems, or handling an unexpected crisis, you can count on Magdalena Lim (林蔡麗珠), Gwo Yen(果嚴), to be there helping out.

Magdalena grew up in a Chinese Catholic family in the Philippines. Her interest in Buddhism developed while she was a Literature and History major in college in Manila. Each weekend, she went with a fellow student to the Young Buddhist Activities Association, where they worked in the library and attended sessions. Later, she married, moved to the southern Philippines, and gave birth to five children.

Four years ago, Magdalena and her family moved to Vancouver. She looked for a place to bow to the Buddha, but couldn't understand the Cantonese spoken at the temples she visited. A friend told her that Mandarin was spoken at Gold Buddha Monastery, and she and her youngest son went to visit the monastery. She was surprised that the Bhikshuni who greeted her was an American, and she was even more surprised when the Bhikshuni spoke to her in very clear Mandarin.

The Bhikshuni noticed Magdalena's son, and asked, "How many children do you have?" "Five." "Five! Did you know we have classes for children?"

All five children were promptly enrolled, including the youngest, one-and-a-half year old Geoffrey.

Geoffrey's birth had been difficult for his mother, and she recited the Buddha's name continuously to get her through it. In the Buddhist class, he sat quietly, attentive to what was going on.

Magdalena was impressed by the true cultivation that takes place at Gold Buddha Monastery. Women and men don't speak easily to each other. It's very quiet; there's no talking during meals. And the Dharma Masters can take a lot of suffering. For example, they eat only one meal a day, in contrast to some of the air-conditioned temples Magdalena saw in Asia, where the left-home people have small refrigerators in their private rooms.

Magdalena's respect spread to her family, and all seven of them took refuge with the Venerable Master at Gold Buddha Monastery. All five children can recite the Heart of the Shurangama Mantra, and the four older ones have completely memorized the Great Compassion Mantra. (Geoffrey is still working on it.) Magdalena's oldest son became a vegetarian while attending summer school at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, and then convinced her to also be a vegetarian.

Magdalena's faith in the Buddhadharma has grown through her experience that whenever she is in an especially difficult situation, help seems to appear. For example, one rainy day she suddenly lost control of her mini-van. The steering wheel seemed to jerk out of her hand, and she found herself in the oncoming traffic lane, about to run into a gas station. She hit a Mercedes instead. Four of her children were with her in the mini-van, but no one was hurt in either car. She was quite shaken, however, and didn't know how she would communicate with the police using the little English that she knew. As it turned out, the tow truck driver was from the Philippines. She spoke to him in Tagalog, and he was able to calm her down and translate for her.

Her faith also grew because of some unusual things she saw during her first visit to the Sagely City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. On the morning of the celebration of Shakyamuni Buddha's birthday, she was helping a Dharma Master clean a room, when a small white snake crawled in. The Dharma Master told her not to be frightened, just to recite, "Namo Gwan Shr Yin Pu Sa." They did so, and the strange snake went away. Later, Magdalena was alone in the room, and the snake returned. When she began to recite, it left again. Someone explained to her that snakes and dragons are mutual transformations.

That afternoon, the assembly was in the dining hall listening to talks by guest speakers. Magdalena went to the Buddhahall to take care of some business. When she came out, she saw a large, multi-colored cloud shaped like a dragon's head. She ran to the dining hall to tell others what she saw, but she did not want to disrupt the talk. The news spread quickly, however, among those seated at the back of the dining hall, and many people ran out to look. The dragon's head was smaller by then, but its white body was taking shape. Although not all witnesses saw the resemblance to a dragon, the bright colors of the cloud were impressive to everyone.

Magdalena was also inspired at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas by seeing so many American left-home people. In her own practice, she recites the Great Compassion Mantra and the Universal Door of Gwan Shr Yin Bodhisattva chapter of the Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra. She also continues to serve Gold Buddha Monastery in whatever way she can.

