

Rajni Saxena

Rajni Saxena, 65, passed away, surrounded by her immediate family on December 13, 2008, at Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital in Boston, of uterine cancer discovered only two months earlier. Her body was cremated at the Forest Hills Cemetery in Boston after a traditional Hindu ceremony. Her ashes were flown home to India and immersed in the holy waters of the Ganga (Ganges) river in Haridwar, at the foothills of the Himalayas.

Rajni was born May 5, 1943 to Janardhan and Kunti Diesh in New Delhi. She graduated from the Convent of Jesus and Mary in New Delhi, and she completed her Bachelors in Arts in English with Honors from Miranda House College in New Delhi. Her favorite activity was reading, and she was well-versed in English literature, poetry and classical texts – both Western and Indian. When her husband took a sabbatical in 1969 to work at the East-West Center in Hawaii, she taught English at the Sacred Hearts Convent in Honolulu. Thereafter, when her husband studied at Harvard and Columbia Universities in 1970-1971, she worked in Boston and New York. This was the time when she first lived in New England, including a visit to the White Mountains.

She and her husband returned to India in 1971 and as his work took him to a succession of rural communities and major metropolitan cities around the country as well as a two-year stint in Tanzania, she devoted her time and energy to raising their two sons, Samarjit and Sidharth. She enjoyed traveling, music, painting and sketching. But most of all, she enjoyed taking care of her family – she had the rare ability in today's fast paced world to relish frequent, long and lazy conversations about the daily affairs of her family and their friends. Once her sons ventured overseas, she made it a point to visit them in the UK, Europe, the Far East and the United States. Though she was not physically adventurous, she was once observed mounting a camel in order to be closer to her children, who had left for the desert on another camel! She also traveled extensively within India, visiting the game parks, historical sites, and many of the most holy temples and sites. Traveling with her was edifying as she had a deep memory for names and events, and could recount the many stories that surrounded important sites with accuracy and sensitivity.

Having grown up near the Himalayas, she immediately fell for the special charms of Randolph. She especially loved listening to the mellifluous songs of the hermit thrush at dusk as she walked the roads and paths on the hill and in the valley – one of the few places she truly enjoyed walking and outdoor exercise. The pine needles and spruce/fir forests reminded her of the chir and deodar trees she smelled as a child when visiting her grandfather's lodge in Kasauli and Shimla in the Himalayas. She would often remark how the mountains around Randolph had a powerful presence and a mind of their own. Over the years, she made many friends in Randolph and enjoyed being part of the community's activities. She especially loved the flowers, ferns and streams, and many happy moments over the past decade were spent there with members of her family.

Rajni is survived by her husband of 44 years, Sada Shankar Saxena; her sons Samarjit Shankar and wife Tara of Randolph, NH and Arlington, MA, and Sidharth Shankar of Guangxi, China; and her much awaited and beloved granddaughter Uma Dev Grace. She was predeceased by her parents.



Rajni Saxena
Submitted by Samarjit Shankar

Lotusland, Part 2 of 3

By Robert Krusyna, June 4, 2008

Our trip, entitled "Khmer Kingdoms", was intended primarily to visit the ruins of the Khmer civilization which, centered in the Angkor complex in Cambodia, dominated Southeast Asia from about 800 AD to 1400 AD. But it was impossible to separate and isolate it from the historical and current importance of religion, both Hindu and Buddhist. Thus the huge amount of information we received did not form a coherent story; there was no thread, just bits and pieces as unfortunately, is often the case with this article.

The original proto-Khmer civilization was situated in the delta region of the Mekong River (now in Vietnam) as a way-station for sea trade between India and China. Goods were shipped across the Bay of Bengal, carried across the Malay Peninsula to the Gulf of Siam, and put on vessels sailing the South China Sea to ports in southern China, and vice-versa. This route avoided going around via Singapore and the Strait of Malacca, because of the danger of shipwreck in the narrow passage and of pirates. As a result of this trade, the Khmer people were subjected to influences from the more advanced societies of China and in particular, India. In the early centuries AD, Hinduism gradually became the principal religion and Sanskrit the language of the elite. Because their coastal cities were vulnerable to attack and invasion, over time the Khmers moved their capital farther inland, ultimately ending in the heartland north of the Tonle Sap, a huge inland lake of more than 1000 square miles. Here in 600 AD King Jayavarman II declared himself universal monarch and began the development of the stupendous political-religious complex called Angkor. For some 800 years, subsequent rulers added buildings, public works like reservoirs, and shrines which were intended to demonstrate their connection to the divine. In the meantime, they expanded the territory of the Khmer empire to include most of present-day Cambodia, to the south and east parts of Laos and Vietnam, and a considerable area of central Siam (Thailand) to the north. We visited Khmer sites as far afield as Wat Phu on the Mekong near the Thai-Laos border, Phimai in central Thailand, nearly 200 miles from Angkor, and Phnom Rung, on the ancient paved (!) road connecting Phimai to Angkor.

Hinduism is still the major religion of India and is important in other South Asian countries. It spread into Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Myanmar (Burma, in the British corruption of the actual name of the country, "m'yama") and Southeast Asia. Centuries later, Buddhism followed the same path. By western standards, it could hardly be described as a religion at all. It consists of a huge number of beliefs, practices, and sects. It has no creed or hierarchy. Its central tenet is a commitment to an "ideal way of life" (dharma), but even this has many interpretations dependent on one's place in the caste system. Unlike Christianity, which is linear - birth, life, death, afterlife - Hinduism is circular - birth, life, death, rebirth *ad infinitum* - one's soul transmigrates from body to body until it breaks out of the cycle. There are innumerable gods, demy-gods, spirits and demons, all of whom have human characteristics and foibles. Perhaps the closest parallel is the pantheon of gods of ancient Greece. At the top are Brahma, the Creator, Vishnu, the Protector, and Shiva, the Destroyer. Most of the temples we encountered were dedicated to Shiva, probably because he is the one most needing to be placated. He also possesses the most amusing and antic personality; many of the bas-reliefs feature the "Dancing Shiva". In the two great epic poems of Hinduism, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, the gods interact with humans, taking sides and affecting outcomes. These stories are more similar to Homer's Iliad and Odyssey than to the Bible. It is of interest that Hinduism unabashedly exhibits a strong erotic streak whereas the other major religions of the world actively try to suppress the carnal.

Intolerance is the dark face of Hinduism, mostly as a result of the caste system. There are five principal castes and innumerable sub-castes, which immutably determine one's place in society and what one can do with his life. Mobility doesn't exist. Another aspect of intolerance is the position of women, who are treated as inferior beings, expected to serve their husbands without any independent life. This attitude culminates in the barbaric practice called "suttee", in which a widow is expected to commit suicide on her husband's bier (but not vice-versa!). While no longer universal, suttee is not uncommon even in today's "modern" India, the "world's largest democracy". Hah!

"Lotusland", continued

Back to the Khmer empire. For most of us, the word Angkor means Angkor Wat, which is one of the most stunning sites in the Angkorean region, comprising some 50 or more square miles. The reason these monuments remain is because they are constructed of stone. Many are now overgrown by jungle, sometimes being held together by huge tress and sometimes being destroyed by those very trees. The basic material is laterite, a soft, damp material vaguely resembling peat, but which dries and hardens when exposed to air. The facings are of sandstone, which lends itself to carving. The primary architectural influence comes from Hinduism, although many of the shrines were conceived as Buddhist. Everywhere project towers in an idealized form of the **lotus bud**. The carvings and statues are a hodge-podge of Hindu and Buddhist mythology and theology.

At Angkor Wat, the central shrine represents the Hindu (and Buddhist) cosmos. In the middle, the highest tower symbolizes Mount Meru, the apex of the universe, while the four corner towers are peaks subsidiary to Meru. The outer wall, with many smaller towers, stands for the mountains at the edge of the world and the moat represents the seas beyond. The temple was built around 1150 by Suryavarman II and served as his mausoleum. It was dedicated to the god Vishnu, one of the Hindu trinity, but for the last 600 years has been a Theravada Buddhist shrine. Because it faces west, the ideal time to visit is sunset, when it is suffused with a reddish glow. So Harriet and I hired a rickshaw and did it properly! Another evening we attended a performance of the Royal Cambodian Ballet on the grounds, dancing an episode from the Hindu epic poem The Ramayana. To see this monument is an overwhelming artistic experience, comparable only to perhaps the Taj Mahal, the Athenian Acropolis, or the Registan in Samarkand.

Along with Angkor Wat, the most impressive monument we visited was the Bayon, a Buddhist temple in the center of the walled capital city called Angkor Thom, built around 1200 AD by Jayavarman VII, probably the greatest Khmer king. The most immediately striking feature is the four heads, each facing in a cardinal direction, carved onto the 54 towers of the temple. With their hooded eyebrows and benignly serene smile, they could be taken for images of the Buddha, but scholars agree that they portray the king. Indeed, there are literally hun-

dreds of such faces adorning myriad temples in the region.

However, the exquisite bas-reliefs are the main attraction. They adorn the galleries along the sides of the inner shrine, arranged on three levels, not unlike comic strips. The top tier depicts events in the realm of the gods, the middle historical scenes from the reign of the king, and the bottom scenes from daily life. This last is the only information archeologists have about ordinary life in the Khmer era, as written records are practically nonexistent. Two beautifully carved panels from the middle depict the king leading his troops in battle. In one, he rides an elephant, umbrella over his head, against foes who are probably Chinese because of the type of hat they wear. (We did not ever see an elephant on our trip; they have been rendered obsolete by power machinery.) The other panel shows a naval battle on the Tonle Sap against the Cham people from Vietnam, complete with combatants falling overboard and being devoured by crocodiles. Since the temple faces east, dawn is the best time to visit.

In these lands, the lives of ordinary people are played out along the rivers: the Mekong in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, the Mae Nam Chao Phraya and its tributaries in Thailand, and the Irrawaddy in Myanmar. To get a feeling for daily life, we took a number of river cruises. The practices we observed did not differ much from those in the bas-reliefs carved a thousand years ago. Everywhere people live in shanties, which need to be relocated to higher ground during the rainy season when the rivers flood. The "fields", mostly rice paddies, are washed away as well and must be reestablished afterward. Impermanence governs life. Nevertheless, the waterways provide the transportation network as well as fish, the only protein these people ever get.



Angkor Wat showing Lotus Shaped Flowers. Robert Krusyna photo.

3-Day- 60 Mile Walk to Help Fight Breast Cancer

Randolph's Louise Cote, is preparing to walk 60 miles in the 3-day fundraiser sponsored by The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. This event lasts a full weekend in select cities across the United States. Louise will walk in Boston on July 24 – 26. She was inspired to join this event when her daughter told her about a friend who had breast cancer, but who also had a good chance of survival. "Research makes this possible," Louise said, "I had a friend who was not as lucky and she passed away two years ago. I will be walking in her memory." Louise and her daughter, who lives in southern Massachusetts, have been working hard to follow a training schedule in order to get fit for this 60 mile walk. Anyone interested in learning more about this event may call Louise at 466-2609 or e-mail her at LCOTE@ne.rr.com.

INVITATION TO ALL RANDOLPHIANS

Jackie and Hersh Cross
&
Laurie and Pat Archambault
wish to commemorate the
marriage of their granddaughter

Corinne
to
Bradley Cartwright IV

With a reception at
HIGHACRES
Saturday, July 25, 2009
4pm to 7pm

ALL RANDOLPHIANS ARE INVITED
Please mark your calendars

Historical Prints

By Meg Meiklejohn

In 1962 Peter Perrin generously gave the Randolph Town Library a copy of *Scenery of the White Mountains*, with 16 plates from the drawings of Isaac Sprague and descriptions of the scenes written by William Oakes, published in 1848. Although the book was in poor condition, the plates were mostly undamaged and the library trustees have had seven of them framed. Four scenes of Crawford Notch and three scenes of Franconia Notch have been hung in the White Mountain Room where they are a handsome and appropriate addition to the library's collection of historical material. The remaining nine plates from the book have been matted with the intention of selling them by silent auction at future Annual Book and Bake Sales. Further information will be available in the library.

Note from the editor:

At the Town Meeting on March 10th, the Trustees of the Randolph Town Library presented Meg Meiklejohn with one of these framed and matted prints in recognition of more than 16 years of dedication to the town library. Meg retired as a trustee in March. The Friend's Group also acknowledged Meg's services by presenting her with a Hydrangea plant and at an earlier trustee's meeting; Meg's tenacious efforts were recognized with a plaque dedicating the work room of the library in her name.



Jean Malick presents Meg Mikeljohn with a framed print from the "Oakes" collection. Photo by Angela Brown.

Mount Crescent Trailhead Project Underway

By Doug Mayer and Ben Phinney

For the past two years, members of the Randolph Community Forest Commission, the Randolph Mountain Club, and the Town of Randolph have quietly been laying the groundwork on securing a permanently-protected trailhead, at the end of Randolph Hill Road, for the many trails in the Crescent Range. Thanks to the generosity of Becky Boothman and Wayne Parker, we now have an option for 10 acres of land, which would serve as a perfect location for a trailhead area, including parking and a small, informational kiosk.

The town of Randolph has until the end of December, 2009, to secure funding and exercise the option to buy the land. Realizing that time is of the essence, representatives of the Community Forest Commission, the town, the Randolph Foundation and the Randolph Mountain Club, came together this spring, to develop a strategy. The town needs to raise \$150,000 to cover the appraised value of the land, and complete the simple, rustic parking area and kiosk for hikers, skiers and snowshoers. In order to purchase the land, the first \$105,000 is needed by December 31, 2009.

Much has transpired in just a few short months. An active committee is now hard at work. Members of the committee represent a broad cross-section of the Randolph community, and include a current and past president of the Randolph Mountain Club, members of the Forest Commission, a representative from the Board of Selectmen, and the current president of the Randolph Foundation. The committee roster consists of Ben Phinney, Paula Bradley, Michele Cormier, Dave Govatski, Ken Lee, Cathy MacDowell, Doug Mayer, John Scarinza and David Willcox.

Since its inception, the committee has developed a project budget, a fundraising plan and a timeline for the endeavor. Members of the Randolph Mountain Club, as well as recipients of the Mountain View, received a mailing about the project a few months ago. In conjunction with a successful grant application to the Fields Pond Foundation, over \$40,000 has already been pledged to the project, including a pledge of \$5,000 each from the Randolph Foundation and the Randolph Mountain Club.

Over \$100,000 remains to be raised, however – a heady goal, in this era of economic unraveling. This spring and summer, the committee hopes to secure a number of meaningful gifts from both foundations and private donors. Gifts of cash or securities can be made to the Randolph Mountain Club, the Randolph Foundation, or directly to the Town of Randolph.

When an opportunity presents itself to help preserve part of Randolph's unique outdoors heritage, its residents have consistently shown themselves to be generous with their time and money; the trails clean-up from the devastating 1998 ice storm, the creation of the Randolph Community Forest, and the construction of Stearns Lodge all come to mind. Now, this out-of-doors community is faced with another great opportunity that, if achieved, will help protect our mountain heritage for future generations.

We look forward to sharing more information on the progress of this project, this summer. Should you have questions about the Mount Crescent Trailhead project, please don't hesitate to contact one of the members of the committee, or committee Chairperson Ben Phinney at Phinney.ben@gmail.com.



View from hillside above the proposed trailhead area.
B. Arnold photo.



"The Sweet Season"

Jeff Parker and Maria Neal pour sap from one of their best trees in front of the sugar house on Randolph Hill. They are the fourth Boothman generation making maple syrup in Randolph. According to Jeff, this tree produced sap containing 11% sugar a few years ago, 1% shy of the state record.

B. Arnold photo.

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