

Friends of Taktse *UPDATE*

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This past winter, for the first time, students accompanied teachers on their annual professional development tour of progressive schools in the United States. Following are essays that convey their impressions.



Connecting with Maya Angelou

by Sagun Limboo

"Everyone get up. Get up and stand on top of your desks!" Mrs. D nudges us to get up. We look at each other. No one makes a move. "C'mon you guys! Everybody! Stand on your desks!"

We slowly get up. Some of us have confused expressions on our faces and some are thinking this is crazy. I am giddy and unsure of what's happening. All of us slowly climb up on our desks while Mrs. D patiently waits.

"Stand tall and just let go of the stanzas you have memorized" she commands. Silence.

"Be proud and recite! Everyone in the school should be able to hear you! From the students to the teachers to the cleaners to the cooks...even to the cows in the field!"

Again we are all looking at each other and although we are trying not to, the corners of our lips start twitching to form a smile. Of course. This was Mrs. D's Lit class. There had to be something crazy for us to do. There was unification in our silence, and then, with deep breaths taken, we recited our stanzas.

Tall. Proud. Powerful. There was an invisible mist of strength embracing all of us and, looking at the ceiling, we just let go of Maya Angelou's words:

*The caged bird sings with a fearful trill
of things unknown but longed for still
and his tune is heard on the distant hill
for the caged bird sings of freedom.*

This Lit class of 2010 is still vivid in my memory. While we were studying Maya Angelou back then, I never thought that one day I would sit at the same table, under the same roof, and listen to her stories. As a ninth grader, I never thought we would actually hear her say aloud the names we had read in her book. I never thought this unforgettable morning could happen, but it did. We actually met Maya Angelou. In her house. How crazy is that?

Dr. Angelou is a generous and wonderful human being. I feel so, so blessed to have had the chance to sit next to her and talk and listen to her stories! Just hearing her talk about Martin Luther King and Langston Hughes was so dreamlike. These are names I have read in books! I still cannot believe this happened to me! I cannot thank Mr. Terry Dozier enough for organizing this visit for us.

When we told Dr. Angelou about reciting her poem on top of our desks, her reply was, "Thank your teacher for doing that."

It still feels surreal, but I know it happened, and it is so inspiring. Today a Taktse legend was born.

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The Holocaust Museum

by *Simrin Tamhane*

The Holocaust Museum was like walking through the streets of Germany and Poland from 1933 to 1945, and silently observing the past. I felt a mixture of anxiety, fear and pain as I walked through the exhibits and artifacts, especially the actual cattle cars, which had transported so many people to the death camps. The strong smell of the wood and the darkness that pervaded the cattle car made me think of all the people who had once been cramped up in there—cramped on a journey to death. Thinking of those who once stood on the same wooden floor made me feel trapped, so I fled from the car.

As if that weren't enough, another room had shoes of the victims of the death camps. Shoes of different styles. Different sizes. Women's dancing shoes. Men's dress shoes. Children's fancy shoes and children's play shoes. Boots. Slippers. Each pair once had a life, once walked. Pairs that belonged to thousands. Twenty-five thousand pairs right in front of me. Seeing all these empty shoes that were snatched away from their owners made me imagine what life for the Jews was like in those terrible days.

Emerging from the dark museum and stepping into bright daylight reminded me of what a survivor had said about coming out of hiding after being in a dark sewer for more than thirty hours. That is what fear must have felt like. The smell of wood in the cattle car is what fear must have smelt like. Fear must have tasted like hard bread and watery soup with potato skins and vegetable scraps. Fear must have been shoes being taken away from you during the bitter European winter. Fear was having number 140682 tattooed on your arm, and realizing how many had been numbered before you. Fear was having your head shaved. Fear was not knowing where your grandparents, siblings and children had gone when they were sent to the other line.



This is the identification card I got at the Holocaust Museum: Hela Los, born 1923, Warsaw, survivor.

I walk and I see cinders from the past.
The brown uniforms, damaged doors, thousands of shoes.

I walk on.

I walk and I see what the outcome of hatred can lead to.
To the death of 6 million innocent people-
To the death of thousands and thousands of children- who never saw or were touched by life.

I am confused and I am angry- still I walk on.

I walk and look at the thousands of pictures hung on the walls and a thought enters my mind.

A simple thought.

'They had lives'

They were humans. And had everything stripped off them.

Their clothes.

Their rights.

Their pride.

Their souls.

And still they walked.

And walked.

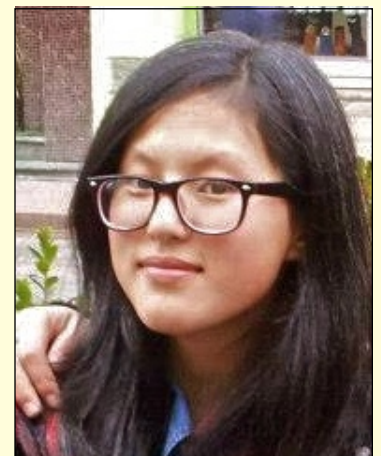
And won.

Their tears were their strength,

And stories a reminder.

'NEVER AGAIN'

by *Tenchung Namgyal*





Taktse Friends Come for a Visit

A group of educators and supporters associated with the Marion Institute, Taktse's 501(c)3 sponsor, visited Taktse in March. The group included Michael Baldwin, Phillip Long, Sally Hunsdorfer, Desa van Laarhoven, Susie Babcock, Dickon Verey, Dickie Chappell, and Megan and Jasper Reid and their twin daughters Cecilia and Elsa.

Michael Baldwin said, *"The culture at Taktse is amazing. So much of that is about love, kindness, caring, compassion, sharing, old with young, students with teachers, etc. There is a joi de vivre that is incredibly infectious and endearing. You cannot imagine how much we loved reading with students, doing workshops about "our stories," participating in group discussions and teacher round tables, and eating lunches with students and teachers."*



We are all pumped and so thrilled to have made this journey, and positively in love with the school and all that are part of it."

Voices of Taktse



Click [***The Students Speak!***](#) to see a video of Taktse students expressing their impressions of Taktse by Alex Maness.

For more insights into the nature of Taktse, watch [***Welcome to Taktse***](#) by Susan Schwarzwald.

Co-founder and teacher Maria Lauenstein sheds light on Taktse's educational philosophy in [***Learning Together***](#), a humorous yet insightful anecdote about teaching teachers.

When Taktse students and teachers visited America in early 2013, they shared their impressions with gatherings of supporters in Massachusetts and North Carolina. See [***Taktse Teachers & Students***](#).



Want to make a difference?

Share your special talents with Taktse students, teachers, and staff through our Fellowship Program. See: <http://taktsefellowship.org/>

The Taktse newsletter is edited by Lonnie Friedman & Paul Lauenstein. To add a friend, or unsubscribe to the Taktse newsletter, email Lonnie Friedman at: lonnie.friedman@comcast.net

Lhatsun Domang Terchen Rinpoche Visits Taktse

Domang Rinpoche, one of the great Nyingmapa teachers from Sikkim, visited Taktse in February. He is a Dzogchen master and a Bodhisattva, an enlightened one who prays and does other acts for the benefit of all sentient beings.

As good omens for the visit, Board member Lok Babu, and teachers Malisha Chhetri and Sudha Gurung placed copper vases filled with water on the first step of the school.

The revered octogenarian climbed all the way to the top of the building, despite being extremely winded at the top of each staircase, to bless the library, the classrooms and the hostel with rice and prayers. Many parents

brought their children to receive his blessings. He blessed every single person who appeared—from the kitchen staff on up. He radiated calm and gentleness. He said, "Teach the students to be good human beings," and encouraged the Dharma teacher, Lopenla. Sonam, to instill good manners and ethics in the children. It was an honor to be in his presence.

Domang Rinpoche, whose niece is a Taktse student, has supported Taktse both financially and spiritually since its foundation. He loves the school, and was pleased to see Taktse's progress, including the new road and building.

In past years, when Taktse students and teachers visited Domang Rinpoche at the temple in Yuksom, he made a lasting impression on them, and deepened their appreciation for their cultural and religious roots. They look forward to visiting again.



What Taktse Means To Me



I have been a student at Taktse for the past seven years. Each year, I have seen myself grow with the school. In the first year, I remember only one building surrounded by muddy fields, and one school bus wiggling as it rolled up and down with the joyful children inside. Today, Taktse has more than five times the number of students, a proper road, a proper basketball court, and a huge football field. A new building is under construction. The only thing that hasn't changed in the past seven years are the smiles that students have on their faces when coming to school.

Since coming to Taktse, I have learned a lot. From a student who didn't have any courage to speak with his elders, I have become a person who now has the confidence to speak in front of all of you. No other school can compete with Taktse. The teachers here are the most friendly and open teachers anyone can ever have. The library has a collection of the most beautiful books from all over the world.

– Prateek Agarwal, Grade XI

Taktse is the flutter of prayer flags along the driveway. Taktse is the red roofs and cream walls. Taktse is the thoughtful writing, the colorful sketches and the neat origami on the bulletin boards. Taktse is the sound of a bouncing basketball. Taktse is triangular desks and wide windows. Taktse is the sound of chattering students. Taktse is that magician's black top hat, which contains wonders of everything.

– Anoushka Shrestha, Grade XI



Since coming to Taktse I have learned to speak better English. I have made a lot of friends and learned many good things from them. I have become more comfortable speaking to large groups.

Taktse is a school in which the students get many opportunities and no one gets left out. Many visitors come and interact with the students, and the students learn many things from them. All the students care for each other and are very united.

– Arman Bhattacharya, Grade VII

Taktse gives us opportunities. It teaches us to be honest, kind and fair. I have developed a love for writing and reading at Taktse. I enjoy every moment at Taktse, and I think it is an incredible school.

– Kitsho Tenzing, Grade VII



At Taktse I get a chance to be a part of various interesting workshops, where I have the freedom to speak and express my feelings in my own way. I can ask questions about anything I do not understand as long as the question is related to the topic.

Taktse is a school where there is a feeling of love, caring and kindness between the teachers and students, and all share a love for reading.

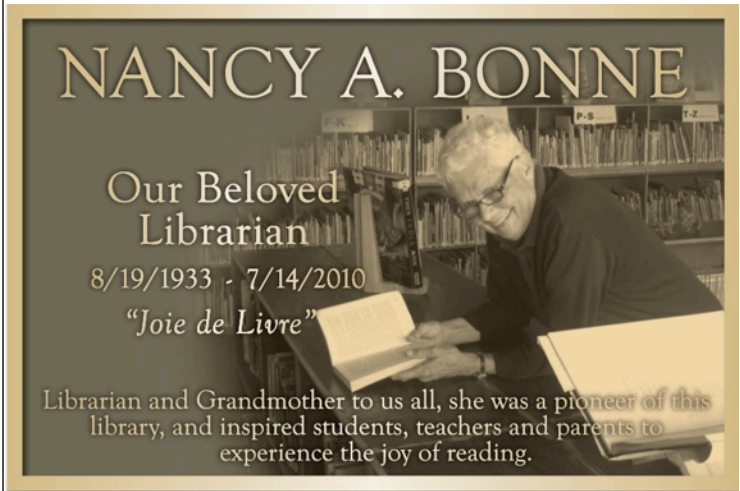
– Jigdal Gyatso Bhutia, Grade X



Anna Buckner, a graduate of UNC, with her fourth grade class. Anna is teaching at Taktse for a year as a volunteer.

Nancy Bonne Library Fund

The late Nancy Bonne, who was a librarian at the Beverly Public Library, is affectionately remembered at Taktse as the "Grandmother of the Library." Despite her advanced age, she journeyed to Taktse twice, helped build Taktse's growing collection of books, and encouraged Taktse parents to read to their children. Her daughter Susan Long and her family recently honored her memory by endowing the Nancy Bonne Library Fund. Donations can be made to: Nancy Bonne Library Fund, c/o Marion Institute, 202 Spring St., Marion, MA 02738.



A Shared Vision for a Sustainable Future

Taktse is proud to partner with Sungevity to promote clean solar power for a healthier environment and a more hopeful future. Sign up for Sungevity's solar energy lease program and they will donate **\$750** to Taktse. Plus, you'll receive a **\$750** American Express gift card! Click [HERE](#) to get a free iQuote!

Sungevity leases solar panels in the following states: AZ, CA, CO, DE, MA, MD, NJ, and NY. For a reference, contact Paul Lauenstein at 781-784-2986, or lauenstein@comcast.net.



Taktse Wish List

Support Taktse students by providing them with books to stir their imaginations. See Taktse's [wish list at Amazon.com](#). Books and educational games can be sent to:

Lonnie Friedman
4 Gavins Pond Road
Sharon, MA 02067
lonnie.friedman@comcast.net

Visitors traveling to Sikkim will take donated books to Taktse.



Heirloom Tomato Sale Benefits Taktse

"Hooray! Spring is here! It's time to order your tomatoes!" So begins Ann Lasman's announcement of her plant sale fundraiser.

For several years, Ann has been growing and selling heirloom tomato plants to benefit worthy causes. Last year she added basil plants, and the response was great. This year the proceeds will be split between two wonderful organizations: Taktse International School and the Tanzanian Children's Fund/Rift Valley Children's Village in Karatu, Tanzania.

For more information, contact Ann Lasman at: annlasman@gmail.com.



Lorraine Warren, Carole Watters, Patricia Hammon, Emily Fisher, Karin Weber, Aggie Kuperman, and Joyce Pegg visited Taktse in April.



A Miracle of Education by Karin Weber

Wishful thinking brought six friends and me to Taktse International School, and our trip has become one of the most memorable experiences of our lives. Each of us was transformed in some way. Everyone with whom we interacted in Gangtok and Taktse International School was most hospitable and generous.



As for the school—wow! We witnessed a miracle of education at Taktse – a school which educates its students' hearts as well as their minds. Everyone at Taktse (teachers, administrators, staff, board members) daily manifests the school's mission, despite unreliable electrical service, lack of central heat, and limited funds. This just proves that the essence of education has more to do with the spark that passes between a teacher and a student, than with facilities, computers, etc.



As for the students—wow again! My friends and I were astonished by their wide-ranging knowledge of world events, enthusiasm for learning, and sense of community. In the future, I will judge other educational projects by Taktse's high standards.



Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has." Her comment describes Taktse perfectly. As for my friends and me, we may have left Taktse, but it will never leave us.



