

# Monumental Objects of Learning

## *Conserving the Personal Effects of the Vidyadhara*

By Carol Johnstone

*“My writings are for the students, therefore they should be respected. However, I would like to ask that no one act like Ouspensky and try to systematize my work. The monumental objects should be cherished and kept. The household articles should be treated as special, under the guidance of Lady Diana. I have never conducted myself frivolously, so all my collections should be regarded as objects of learning.”*

*—From an unpublished spiritual will of the Vidyadhara, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Used by permission of Lady Diana J. Mukpo.*

Most readers of the Shambhala News are probably familiar with the Shambhala Archives’ dedicated work in cataloguing and preserving the Vidyadhara’s manuscripts and the thousands of photographs, audio and video tapes. You may have seen some of the results in new editions and compilations of previously-published and unpublished manuscripts, and in the expanded catalogue of Shambhala Recordings.

Long-time students Jan Watson and Jean Riordan-Perks are coordinating a committee to do similar work with the Vidyadhara’s personal effects and practice materials. In the ten years since his death, these precious “objects of learning” have been caringly inventoried, catalogued and stored by a handful of *kusung* (Rinpoche’s personal attendants). At this point, however, some objects are showing signs of deterioration.

Watson and Riordan-Perks plan to begin conservation by finding an atmospherically controlled, accessible storage space, and availing themselves of the expertise of the other committee members: Shambhala Archives director Carolyn Gimian, kusung



*Photo by Judith Smith, courtesy of the Shambhala Archives.*

officer Richard Peisinger, and conservation consultants John Perkins and Margaretta Sander. Their plan is to store the objects in acid-free, archival containers, and document each item according to its origin, use, and the stories associated with each.

All of these objects, valuable in themselves and empowered by the Vidyadhara’s use, can bring alive the world of the Vidyadhara to those who never met him, and provide vivid recollections for those who did. Following Rinpoche’s wishes, and taking a “long” view, Watson and Riordan-Perks feel “the fruition could be a dignified and outrageous Shambhala museum complex, in the style of a dharma art installation” that could include the Archives, a library,

video theater, and traveling exhibits.

Among the items to be preserved are the Surmang relics, including Naropa’s skull, Padmasambhava’s crown, and a Chakrasamvara rupa (sacred statue) belonging to Naropa. There are numerous Tibetan, Japanese and Shambhalian robes, like the imperial yellow *dogue* (Japanese robe), sewn with the colors of the four dignities at neck and cuffs, worn by Rinpoche on Shambhala Days.

There are also more personal objects, like those pictured in the above photo, taken in the shrine room at Karme Choling. These objects were arranged during the week of the Vidyadhara’s cremation in 1987: A signed picture of British Field



*The Vidyadhara, pictured wearing a favorite tie with dorje pattern. Photo by Mary Lang.*

Marshall Montgomery and Prime Minister Winston Churchill; a golden and black enamel tortoise adorned with the Hapsburg crest, given to Rinpoche by sangha member Peter Goldfarb (Rinpoche would summon his kusung using the “brrring” made by tapping the tortoise’s head); a Rolex watch; a Dunhill lighter and silver cigarette case given to him by staff at the Kalapa Court; a silk suit; a “teaching fan”; and a Tibetan thumb ring that was reportedly found as is (not manufactured), geometric design and all.

Those interested in supporting the conservation project may send queries, suggestions and/or checks (made out to “The VCTR Collection”—contributions are tax deductible) to the Shambhala Archives, 1084 Tower Road, Halifax NS, B3H2Y5, Canada. \*

## *The Shopping Expedition*

WALTER FORDHAM, Head of Household for many years at the Kalapa Court in Boulder, relayed the following stories which conveyed the Vidyadhara’s attitude toward his personal things—including the process of buying them.

### *On “Yun”:*

#### *The White Silk Sports Coat*

Around 1978, I went shopping with Rinpoche in Boston, when he was really focused on ties, of which he had hundreds, and suits. We went into Louis’s clothing store (then on Boylston, now on Berkeley) where he bought this beautiful white silk sports coat. Later, as I was hanging it up in his room I realized it was the kind of thing that he didn’t often wear, so I asked him if he was thinking of wearing it. He said, “Probably not.” I asked him why he had bought it and he said that it had a lot of *yun* (richness) and he didn’t want to leave it for the setting-sun people to buy. There was a sense of acquiring this piece of *yun* so it had a proper home.

### *On Being “Long Changed”*

One day I went to pay the bill for things Rinpoche had bought the day before. The bill was half of what I expected (several thousand dollars), and I thought, well this is the auspicious kind of quirky thing that might happen around Rinpoche and I should just pay what they asked and then tell Rinpoche about it. So I paid the amount they asked and went back to the house and told Rinpoche about this. He immediately got up, we drove to the store, and he asked for the floor manager.

He paid it himself, the whole amount. I had the sense he wanted to make sure the whole thing was paid, that there wasn’t any outstanding debt.

### *On Lhasang*

Whenever he did buy anything at all, whether a shirt, a pair of pants—whatever he acquired to be worn as part of his presentation in the world—before he wore it he would open it up, the kusung would light a piece of incense, and he would do a little lhasang for that object.

### *A Favorite Tie*

I was walking down the street in Boston with Rinpoche when the Vajra Regent passed; he’d just come out of a men’s store that Rinpoche was about to go in. Rinpoche asked him if there were any good ties in there and the Regent said no, that he’d looked them over and that Rinpoche need not bother with that place.

Rinpoche immediately started to grin. He loved to challenge the Regent. Rinpoche was really proud of himself in picking out ties; it was like an art. He’d be focused on one tie out of hundreds that might be lined up, and he’d zero in on it.

So we went in the store and he looked at the case, gazed for a moment, then said, “That one!” That was the tie with the dorje pattern that he wore at many vajrayana talks from that time on (see photo this page). And he always liked to rub it in that the Regent had passed that one by. \*

ANNOUNCEMENT/OPENING PRACTICE

**Richard Rumball**  
Jungian Analyst

*C.G. Jung Institute - Zurich*

Halifax/Lunenburg

Tel: 902-634-3834

SLIDING FEE SCALE

*Jungian Analysis / Individual Counselling  
Psychotherapy / Seminars*