YORK STILLMAN

Practicing in Brazil

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche with York Stillman.

by Carol Johnstone

"I have a tendency to just get lost in regular things, regular life, and have always postponed practice," says York Stillman in his soft southern drawl. "To break that habit of disregarding practice, I focused on important days . . . Milarepa Day is the one I like the most. I look forward to it a lot after Shambhala Day because it's long and it is so inspiring to read that book." He reads through the whole *Rain of Wisdom* out loud. This year it took him three days.

York lives in Sao Paolo, Brazil, where he acts as kasung liaison for South America, teaches the Buddhist dharma, and directs Shambhala Training Levels I to III. He moved there to be with his Brazilian wife, Marilia.

York met Marilia in Durham, North Carolina, in a health club. He'd come to Durham after the 1983 seminary, she for a three-month visit with her brother. York says that a few months before Marilia knew she was going to go to the US, she'd gone to the beach to consult a fortune teller, the kind that reads cards and throws shells. The fortune teller told her, "You're going to be taking a trip soon. You are going to go to a country and you're going to meet a man with blond hair and blue eyes and you're going to get married." Marilia thought this was crazy.

Not knowing any of this, two weeks after he met her York proposed and about six months later they married in Sao Paolo. They lived in North Carolina for five years before moving to Brazil for good.

Marilia is not at all interested in sitting practice. She did a Level I once and hated it. She had no religious affiliation when she met York but became interested in Christianity and now regularly attends Bible classes. However, she has no problem with York being Buddhist. She gave him a puja table last Christmas. He gave her *Speaking of Silence,* a book from one of the Naropa Buddhist/Christian conferences.

York says that the activity of the sangha fell off in 1994 after a house that Marilia's parents had donated for use by the sangha for a few years was sold. During those halcyon years the Sakyong came several times to teach. The group is growing again and now numbers about 15. Eight of those are translating Perna Chodron's *When Things Fall Apart* into Portuguese, under the guidance of Lincoln Berkeley, a long-time student of the Vidyadhara. About 50 or 60 local people have done at least Level I of Shambhala Training, including 12 who have finished Level III. York plans to start teaching Buddhist courses beginning in July with The Battle of Ego. He'll alternate teaching with Oddone Marsiaj, a native Brazilian who has been to Vajradhatu Seminary. Oddone will translate for York, who speaks only conversational Portuguese.

York works at home with Marilia on network marketing with Amway, and has a new project working with Quickstar, a company with shareholders of the likes of Microsoft and IBM, where he'll earn a commission by bringing people to a "virtual mall" on the Web.

Back in his small shrine room in his three-bedroom apartment on the 10th floor, York reads his *Rain of Wisdom.*

In April it's still summertime in the far south. There is no air conditioning or heater in the apartment. He doesn't turn on a fan because "it puts out the candles." Incense overpowers the diesel fuel smell from the buses that start running at 5:30 AM. Sao Paolo is very polluted and York says they have to vacuum the floor three times a week to get up the grit that will turn the soles of your feet black in ten minutes of walking through the flat. Buildings packed side by side are visible through the window that is cracked open to let in a breeze in this city of 22 million souls.

CAROL JOHNSTONE is a writer in Halifax.

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