

IF MEMORY SERVE ME

An introduction to *Jampa's Worldly Dharmas* by Lisa Norris

If memory serves me (always a question), I first met Jampa when he stopped by my office in the Language and Literature building on the Central Washington University campus, for reasons unknown. I was then a professor who taught creative writing but had not then—nor have I yet—experienced the kind of community with poets and artists whose *raison d'être* is to write and perform as did the Berkeley crowd with whom Jampa consorted—including such luminaries as Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan, Allen Ginsberg, and Gary Snyder.

In the midst of my busy schedule during that first meeting with Jampa, I didn't yet know what he'd done or been. I was probably officious—but also intrigued that a white-bearded monk, robed and with a topknot, would appear among the anxious youngsters worrying about their graduation credits. Was he pretentious, a white guy trying to pass as a Tibetan lama, or was he genuine? Crazy or sane? Open to learning and dialogue or parking there to waste my time? I wasn't sure what who he was or what he wanted—I'm still not sure. Perhaps Jampa isn't either. However, I can say that in Jampa's body lives a multitude, and some of his personae have passed on a wealth of experience in great detail, in multiple forms, with dashes of humor and humility that leaven the reported excesses and ego of his earlier years.

Since our early meeting, I have been impressed by Jampa's energies, stories, and generosity as he has brought out books for other writers (present company not excepted) and filled the CWU archives with a number of his books and those of others who have passed through Ellensburg, Washington. His presence in the community where I live has been gracious and inspired in his devotion to art and writing.

The book before you, arranged in abecedarius form, and with charming illustrations, tells and retells episodes from a life begun with biological parents that are still unknown to the adopted Richard Denner who prefers to imagine his origins than to know them factually. Raised by white folks in comfortable circumstances, mostly in Oakland, California, young Richard was a handful, to say the least, whose anti-authoritarian and devil-may-care adventures landed him in jail and mental hospitals on occasion. To his credit, he powered through these episodes and looks back on them with a mixture of sorrow, self-forgiveness, and humor.

The detailed telling of his life not only offers rich context and historical data that would delight any archivist or novelist wishing for information about any number of places, practices, and people during the period of Jampa's life, but also those interested in the variety of occupations Jampa has had—from tree planter to Alaskan homesteader to Central Washington State cowboy or bookstore owner to student, artist, poet, father, husband, printer, publisher, journalist, caregiver, thespian, Mason, monk, and lover. (Note: the previous list is not exhaustive.)

Concerning the latter, Denner and Pécuchet offer matter-of-fact and uncensored accounts of Jampa's sexual encounters, often with humor, revealing not only what some call his sexual addiction but also a parade of partners willing to play their roles in a variety of sometimes-absurd

circumstances. For a feminist reader, the highlighted activities of the penis are sometimes disturbing, particularly since its owner is sometimes unaware of their potentially destructive impacts; however, frequently, the narrative of Jampa is disrupted by the schooling of Pécuchet or others who converse with Jampa on the page, reminding him and the reader how far he's evolved since he was—shall we say—in rut.

One of the hallmarks of Jampa's life, of course, includes his multi-year solitary retreat in the mountains of Colorado, where he practiced a variety of Tibetan Buddhist rituals and yogic postures. Having witnessed the flexibility of Jampa's movements and heard him do a rapid recitation of mantras, I can attest to the fact that his training "took."

Some may accuse autobiographers of egotism and wonder at a Buddhist monk who writes about and thus might seem attached to the Self, but the writers' emphasis in this case isn't to celebrate a particular self so much as to illustrate that there are multiple selves evolving through messy human experience and circumstances to arrive at—well, perhaps at the place where they began.

Meanwhile, the richness of form, multiplicity of voices (quoted or created, and if quoted, always carefully attributed), variety of experiences, locales, and occupations, and playful humor distinguish this volume. It is a complex web constructed with precision, playfulness, and love, shining with a particular beauty through the light of transience.