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# HOW I CARVED MY INNER BUDDHA

THE LAST WORD \* ANGELA GUNN

AT GAS STATIONS, ON ROUNDABOUTS, AND IN FRONT OF THE BALINESE CITY OF KUTA'S BEACH HOTELS, black and white checkered cloth adorned everything in sight; I was mesmerized. Gray statues glared back. Their faces were frozen, smiling ferociously, daring me to awaken to a truth I had always known but could not yet fathom.

These statues appeared to come to life on Christmas Day as my family and I watched Balinese dancers sway to hypnotic gamelan music. Later, when we got caught in a royal funeral procession on the streets of Ubud, we bolted away from a looming, giant, wooden bull. Under the oppressive weight of this three-story, coffin-laden sculpture, the funeral procession and onlookers constantly shifted like waves rushing onto the shore. The threat of injury, even death, was imminent and I began to comprehend the Republic of Indonesia's motto, "Bhinneka Tuggal Ika," translated by some as "Despite differences there is oneness."

Although Hinduism is prevalent in the art and culture of Bali, I left the island with a souvenir found on every market stall: a statue of the bald and rotund, laughing Budai, which best represented to me the awe and wonder I had experienced in Bali and wanted to sustain forever.

My Budai statue traveled the world with me for years afterwards. No matter where we ended up, I would often spend hours rubbing the Budai's sandstone belly in the hopes of regaining a glimmer of that same happiness.


Ten years later, I had written and directed my first short film in New York, the final step I needed to graduate with an MFA in Film and Television. I should have been on top of the world, but my life was stuck in unhappy limbo. Even while surrounded by the art and film I

believed to be the key to my happiness, it wasn't until I was forced, in order to graduate, to take an online class called World Religions, that life began to fall into place.

Buddhism was simply a passing thought in my course book, a banality on the otherwise fascinating pages. Yet, in my class research, I discovered podcasts by Insight Meditation teacher Gil Fronsdal; no matter which Zencast I listened to, Gil's lessons always helped clarify my problems.

I began to understand that the basis of my suffering lay in my relationship to my thoughts. This led me to write my first published article for the Tiny Buddha Web site. As one of the Web site's most popular blog posts of 2010, I took my success and I began a daily blog based on my spiritual practice.

Still, I continued to rub the Budai's belly, seeking ever-elusive happiness, until the day my Balinese Budai had his head smashed in by a tiled floor. A chord in me was struck that hadn't played since my trip to Bali, and after a year of writing daily about my spiritual practice, I saw the Budai as the impermanent sandstone statue it was.

Now a new Balinese sandstone Buddha sits in peaceful meditation by my bedside. It reminds me of what the Budai failed to teach me for all those years: even if I never do smile like my Balinese Budai, inner peace is the best gift I can learn to carve within myself, and my happiness is a choice I have to make in every moment. 

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## The Betty Meyer Memorial Fund



On the first anniversary of her passing, the Board of Directors of Faith & Form has instituted a fund in memory of Betty Meyer, Hon. AIA, who served as editor of Faith & Form for many years and encouraged excellence in religious architecture and art. The purpose of the fund is to support the on-going publication of Faith & Form, to help sustain the journal that Betty loved and dedicated herself to.

Contributions to the Betty Meyer Memorial Fund, which are fully tax deductible, are welcome. Contributors will be acknowledged in the journal and on the Faith & Form Web site. Please send your donation to:

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