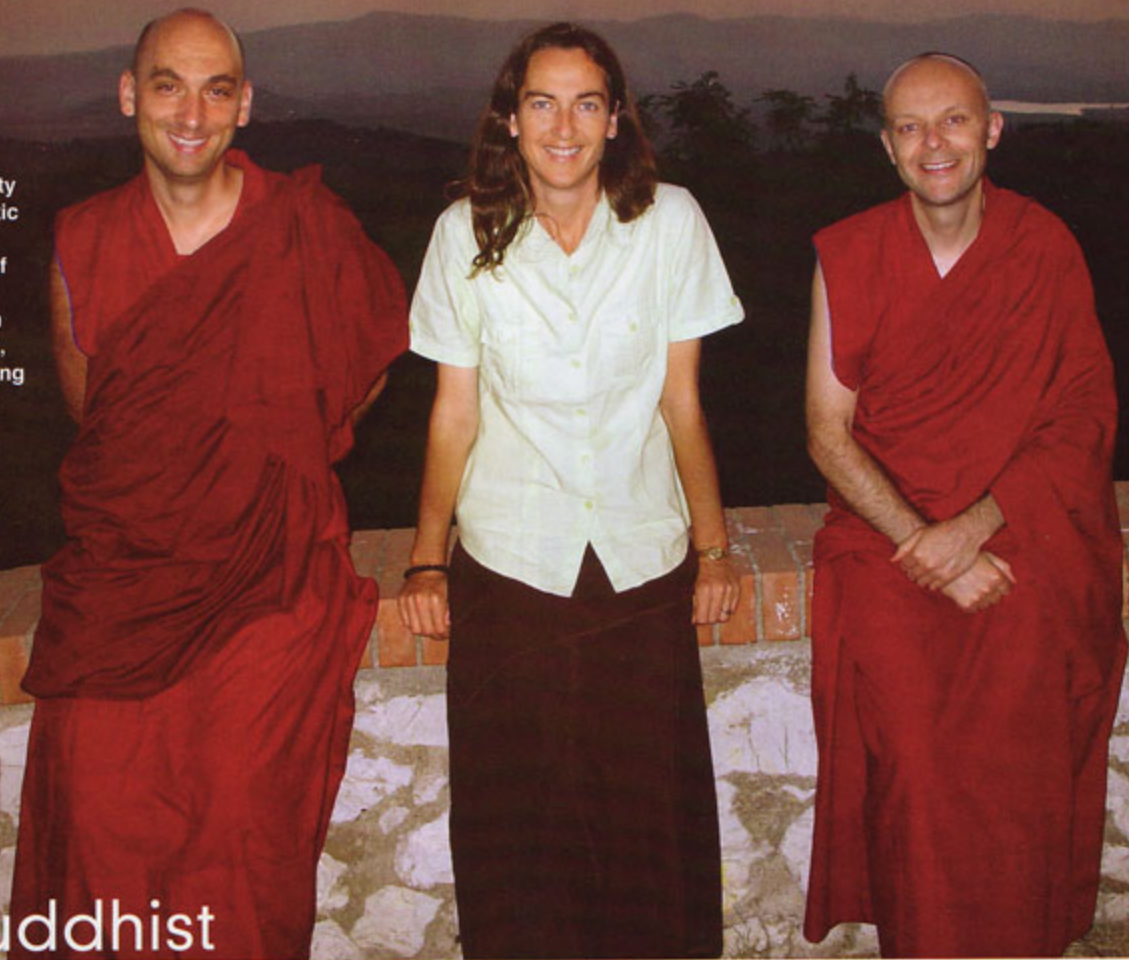


Carol Leela Verity with her monastic friends Justin Solomon (left) of Cape Town and Kevin Middleton (right) of the UK, at the Lama Tzong Khapa Institute, a Buddhist university in Tuscany, Italy.



The Buddhist

CAROL LEELA VERITY, 44

'I had everything I could wish for in my early thirties – a wonderful husband, great career, beautiful house, new BMW... But I didn't have the most important thing – happiness. I worked hard, played hard and made lots of money. This was supposed to bring me happiness but it didn't. I knew there had to be something more meaningful to life and I was determined to find out what that was. I wasn't sure what I was looking for but I had a persistent inner voice that demanded I search for a more spiritual life.

I resigned from my position as an attorney and took time out at our holiday house in Plettenberg Bay, where I picked up a copy of *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramhansa Yogananda (Crystal Clarity). The book gave me a strong sense that I might find the answers to some of my questions in India.

Initially I explored New Age teachings but they were too loose and didn't seem authentic, so I kept searching.

When I eventually discovered Buddhism I knew I had found what I was looking for.

I spent time learning from the Dalai Lama, went on a meditation retreat in Nepal and studied with Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh at his monastery in France.

Those travels changed my life – it wasn't possible to return and be the same person.

Buddhism has taught me a profound way of seeing the world; the interconnectedness of all beings. I've become kinder, more caring and compassionate. Life is no longer just about me.

Buddhism is more than a religion to me, it's a philosophy, a practice, a science of the mind and a more enlightened way of being. It has shown me how I create my own reality

through negative or positive thoughts, which then translate into speech and actions. The Law of Karma, cause and effect, makes so much sense in explaining how we reap what we sow. My positive thoughts, words and deeds bring positive results. Negative actions bring suffering.

Every one of us, even the worst criminal, has a "divine nature" at our core. Buddhism helps us to connect with this inner essence. I don't pray to an external God or ask for forgiveness or for guidance; the answers are deep inside me. I have learnt in my daily meditation to train and still my mind, which has enabled me to access an inner wisdom, peace, creativity, intuition and joy I never had in my life as a successful Johannesburg lawyer.' □

♣ Leela is the founder of Sat Chit Anand Buddhist Centre in Plettenberg Bay.

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