

on *the* Banks

STORIES FROM CAMPUS AND BEYOND

Road to Enlightenment

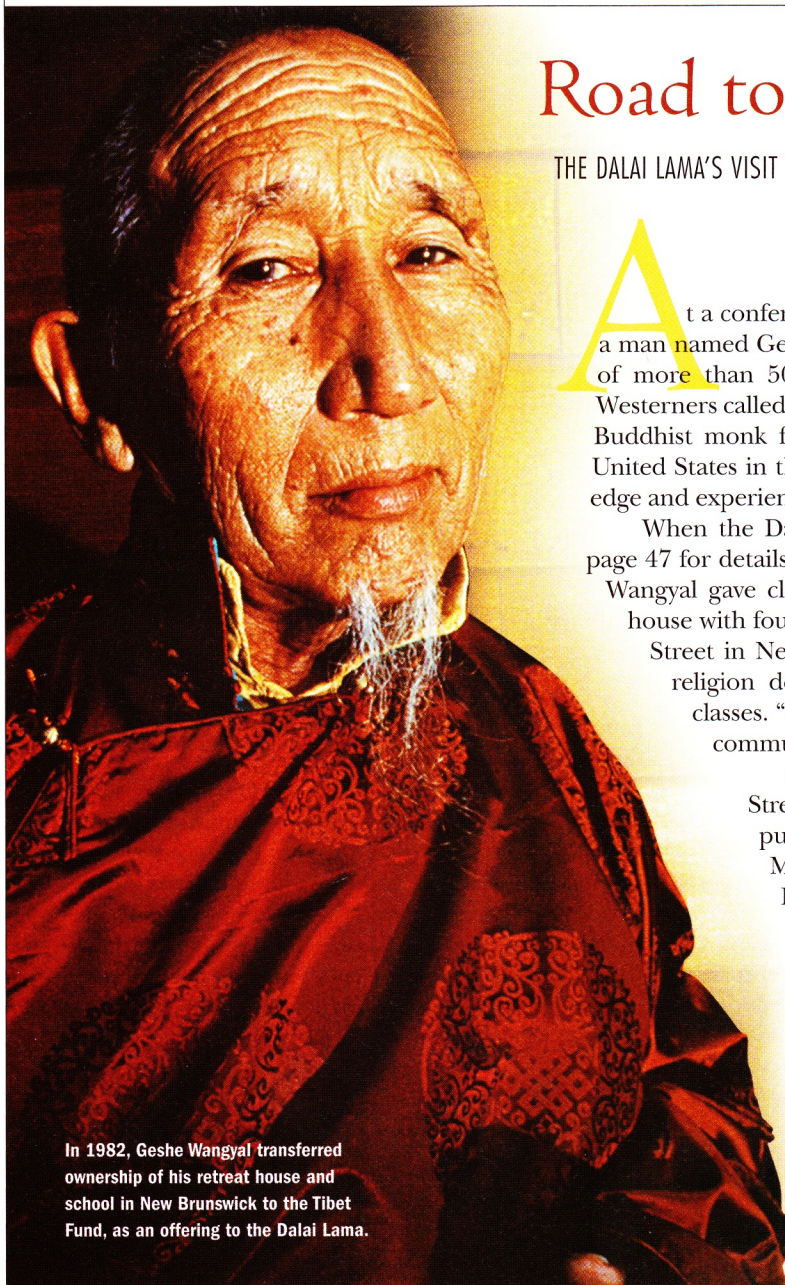
THE DALAI LAMA'S VISIT IS LINKED TO A DISCIPLE WITH RUTGERS TIES

At a conference a few years ago, the Dalai Lama talked about a man named Geshe Ngawang Wangyal who helped create the first of more than 500 Tibetan Buddhism spiritual communities for Westerners called Dharma centers. His Holiness said that Wangyal, a Buddhist monk from the Kalmyk-Mongolian region, came to the United States in the 1950s as a refugee, willing to share “the knowledge and experience of his spiritual practice” with young Americans.

When the Dalai Lama visits Rutgers on September 25th (see page 47 for details), he will be one of the few people who recall that Wangyal gave classes at Rutgers in the 1970s and even shared a house with four other monks from 1978 to 1982 at 281 Hamilton Street in New Brunswick. Chun-fang Yu, former chair of the religion department at Rutgers, remembers attending his classes. “Geshe was very charismatic, accessible, and a great communicator,” says Yu.

Shortly after Wangyal’s death in 1983, the Hamilton Street house was sold and the proceeds put toward the purchase of the current Tibet Fund building in Manhattan, says Joshua Cutler, codirector of Tibetan Buddhist Learning Center in rural Washington Township in Warren County. “Geshe also helped build our learning center with his own hands, and it became one of the first centers for Tibetan Buddhism in the United States,” he says, adding that the Dalai Lama has visited seven times.

Before Yu left for Columbia University in 2004, she lobbied Rutgers to invite the Dalai Lama to the Banks. Says Yu, “I thought it would be a fitting tribute not only to the memory of Geshe Wangyal, but also to New Jersey, the place where Tibetan Buddhism first flourished in America.”



In 1982, Geshe Wangyal transferred ownership of his retreat house and school in New Brunswick to the Tibet Fund, as an offering to the Dalai Lama.