

# Visit by Dalai Lama honors the devotion of Findlay couple

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PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

Phil Sugden hates wasps, and they hate him.

Every summer they seemed to search him out, looking for his arm or a bare foot in which to bury a stinger. When he caught them in his house, he paid them back with a stomp of his shoe.

Not anymore.

After his treks to Tibet, he captures them in jars and releases them outside, remembering a Buddhist monk who became tearful upon swatting a bug from his cheek.

"All beings are on a path of enlightenment," said Carole Elchert, who shares a home and a philosophy with Sugden. "You do feel kind of silly, carrying out this wasp. And if you don't get him out real quick, then he's really (angry)."

Elchert, an assistant professor at the University of Findlay, and Sugden, a transplanted New York artist, are the couple who arranged the unlikely visit of the Dalai Lama to Findlay.

He arrives Thursday on his own path of enlightenment.

The Dalai Lama, winner of the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize, serves at Dharamsala, India, as spiritual leader and president in exile for 6 million Buddhist Tibetans living under Chinese military rule.

Findlay is the only Midwestern stop on his United States tour, which includes appearances at Harvard and Cornell universities, in

Texas and on the West Coast.

He will speak about "Compassion in All Things" to an audience that will include representatives of Gov. George V. Voinovich.

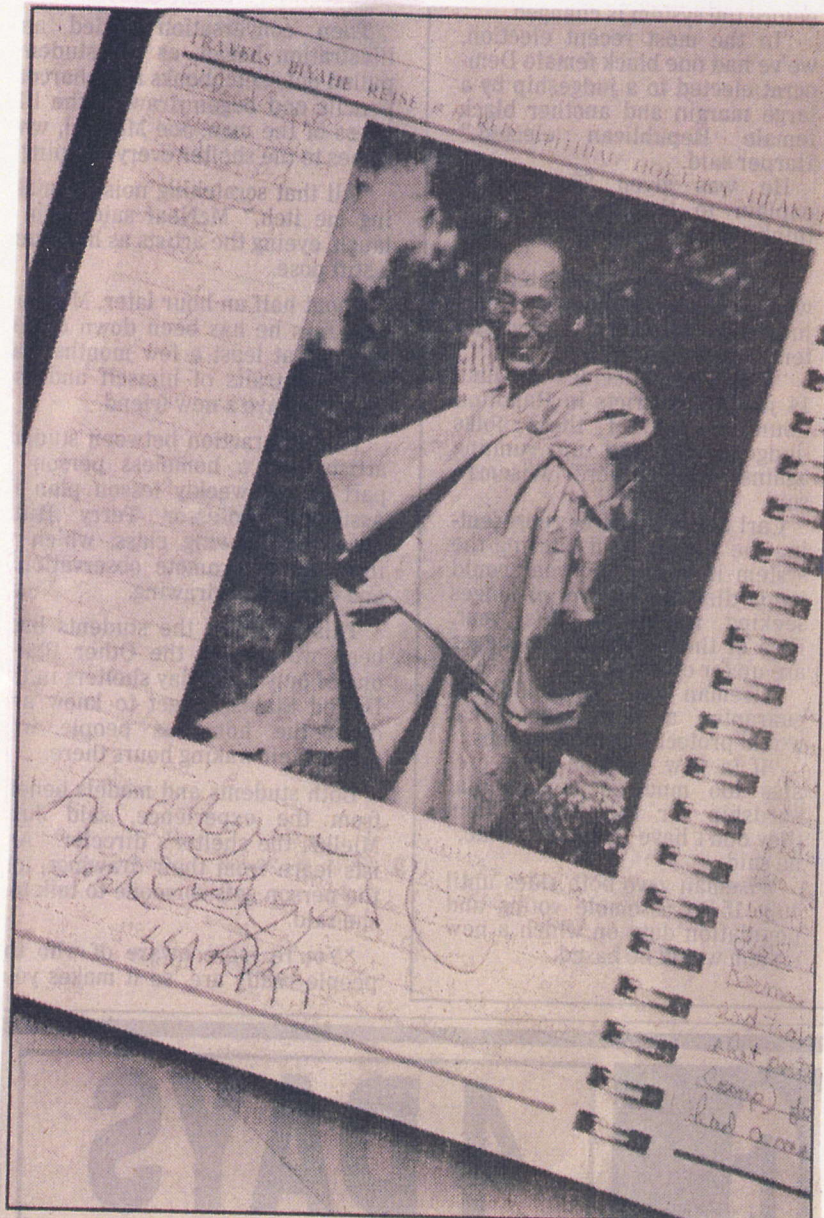
Elchert and Sugden think it might be the lure of friendship that brings the reclusive monk to Findlay, a conservative, churchgoing community better known for its rubber and oil.

The couple say the Dalai Lama is rewarding their sore feet and tired backs, which have climbed the Himalayas six times to experience Tibet and its ancient culture.

But it may be something more.

The story of Tibet's struggle, its suffering and its people returned with Elchert and Sugden, who last year produced "White Lotus," a video documentary of Tibet for public television.

■ Photos and an excerpt from Carole Elchert and Philip Sugden's "White Lotus: An introduction to Tibetan Culture." Plain Dealer Magazine



PD/CHRIS STEPHENS

A page from the journal of Phil Sugden on his trip to Tibet. The Dalai Lama gave him the photograph and autographed the journal.

"The Dalai Lama knows the value of world opinion," Elchert said.

The bankers, lawyers and Marathon Oil executives in Findlay are Sugden's best patrons, paying top dollar for his sketches and drawings of Tibetan architecture and people.

The couple own almost nothing.