



# DIGITAL DHARMA

ONE MAN'S MISSION TO SAVE A CULTURE





## About the Film

Digital Dharma uncovers E. Gene Smith's 50-year journey with renowned scholars, lamas and laypeople as they struggle to find, preserve and digitize more than 20,000 volumes of ancient Tibetan text. Crossing multiple borders – geographic, political and philosophical – Digital Dharma is an epic story of a cultural rescue and how one man's mission became the catalyst for an international movement to provide free access to the story of a people.

To view the trailer and to find out more information on the film please visit our website: [www.digitaldharma.com](http://www.digitaldharma.com)  
To become a fan of the film on Facebook, please visit: <http://www.facebook.com/DigitalDharma>

## About the Mission

In 1959, Tibetan villages were attacked and hundreds of monasteries were destroyed, causing irreplaceable ancient Sanskrit and Tibetan writings to disappear. This tumultuous time put the history of the entire Tibetan culture in peril -- and called a man from Ogden, Utah, to his destiny.

E. Gene Smith became the unlikely leader in an effort to rescue, preserve and share the riches of a 1,500-year-old seemingly lost Tibetan literary culture. Smith's mission crossed geographical, political and philosophical borders to rescue this chronicle of mankind's advancements—from the medical to the mystical.

With Buddhist thought at its core, his goal was to digitize the more than 20,000 volumes he rescued in order to provide free access to the story of a people. With technological advancement speeding forward, Smith's vision was to make these texts accessible to everyone, even in the most remote monasteries and villages, and to preserve the knowledge they contain for humanity.

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## SYNOPSIS

*Digital Dharma* is an epic story of a cultural rescue and how one man's mission became the catalyst for an international movement to find, save and provide open access to the story of the Tibetan people.

When ancient writings of Sanskrit and Tibetan texts vanish during the political turmoil of the 1950s and 1960s, the history of a whole society—its beliefs, customs and roadmap to enlightenment—is in danger of disappearing. Enter destiny in the form of American pacifist E. Gene Smith, a Mormon from Ogden, Utah -- the unlikely leader of an effort to rescue these early insights from mankind's consciousness, from the medical to the mystical.

While studying Sanskrit and Tibetan at the University of Washington in the early 1960s, Smith comes in contact with Tibetan refugees brought to the U.S. to teach. He is asked to help them assimilate into American life. For a while he lives with the family of Dezhung Rinpoche, one of the most learned lamas to escape Tibet. He becomes Smith's friend and teacher, and enlists Smith's assistance in recovering the texts lost during the turmoil in Tibet.

Throughout his mission, Smith faces formidable obstacles. In the 1960s, as a Library of Congress field employee working in a nonaligned nation, he is suspected of being a CIA agent or spy. The continuing political tension revolving around the status of Tibet vis-à-vis the People's Republic of China makes it impossible for him to work directly with China to recover many of the missing texts believed to be unaccounted for within that country. Smith, however, persists and, relying on his natural gifts in diplomacy, succeeds in assembling the resources he needs to continue his mission.

The beauty of Southern Asia and its native cultures envelops the film as Smith returns to India and Nepal in 2008, delivering to remote monasteries hard drives containing 12,000 of the 20,000 ancient

documents he has salvaged. The recovery of missing texts continues, as Smith hopes to ensure the preservation of Tibetan culture for future generations. It is during this return trip that we experience Smith's epic mission through his eyes. He provides us with unique access to the insights and way of life of the world's leading lamas and lineage holders, monks, local "publishers" and other key players in this preservation movement. Their personal stories, told in their own voices, reveal the complexities, challenges and triumphs they have experienced in contributing to this cultural rescue.

Smith's travels take him to his old home in Delhi, the Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamsala, and monasteries of the four Buddhist sects and the Bonpo, the first documented religion in Tibet. Smith's encounters with these traditions provide firsthand accounts of the challenges each faces in its efforts to preserve its roots and survive as a living tradition. *Digital Dharma* reaches an aesthetic and dramatic high point with Smith's meeting at the Sakya Monlam (Mass Peace Prayer), where over 10,000 monks gather at the reputed birthplace of Buddha in Lumbini, Nepal, and his encounter with the incarnations of his first two teachers.

On his return to Southern Asia, Smith must address a major obstacle to his future preservation and publishing plans. In 2008, Tibetan protests lead to violence at the Summer Olympics in China and Smith's delicate negotiations with the Chinese break down after years of planning and progress. It is a tribute to Smith's tact and perseverance that talks are eventually restarted. The agreement reached between his organization (TBRC) and China secures the cooperation of the Chinese government in future preservation and printing efforts.

This feature-length HD documentary is more than the story of one person's struggle, and ultimate triumph, in saving a culture. As political borders shift and societies merge, Gene Smith's story stands as a powerful testament to the importance of protecting and preserving all cultures. And, although loud protests may attract the media spotlight, it may be the lifetime pursuit of wisdom and the quiet but effective exercise of diplomacy that are the real keys to achieving change.

## SYNOPSIS



In 2008 Gene gave me permission to follow him back to India as he set out to deliver, to the main lamas of the four leading Buddhist traditions and the Bon, 12,000 digitized texts of the 20,000 that had been salvaged. These lamas had also spent their lives finding and preserving the texts lost during China's cultural revolution.

For the next four years we were able to document key turning points of this cultural rescue and international movement through the eyes of its catalyst. We witnessed unexpected setbacks – from salvaged texts ruined by flooding in refugee camps to Tibetan protests during the 2008 Olympics in China setting back 20 years of negotiations and progress with the preservationists.

Throughout Gene's journey, our film crew had unique access to leaders, locations and communities that could have happened only with Gene's blessing.

The sudden death of E. Gene Smith in December 2010 was a real-life dramatic twist that has underscored my urgency to tell Gene's remarkable story as soon as possible. The week Gene died, he became the lead obituary in world press such as *The New York Times*, London's *Telegraph* and *The Economist*, with leading headlines such as "The American Lama who Saved Tibetan Literature." I am fortunate to have over sixty hours recorded on HD of the text preservation efforts of this gentle giant of diplomacy and now-iconic figure in American/Asian history.

With this feature film, I want viewers to quickly move from asking why to wanting to learn how: how the mission will be accomplished, how it will all turn out, and perhaps even how they – the viewers – might become agents for accomplishing such a purpose in their own lives.



### Gene Smith

Gene Smith was born in Utah and raised a Mormon. After studying science and anthropology, Smith relies on interest and ability in obscure languages to avoid the Vietnam era draft. While studying Sanskrit and Tibetan at the University of Washington, he takes up Tibetan Buddhism as an academic pursuit and offers to help Tibetan refugees – brought to the U.S. to teach – to assimilate into American life. He is assigned to live with the family of Dzhung Rinpoche, a member of the Phuntsok Palace family and one of the most learned lamas to escape Tibet. Smith teaches English to Dzhung and Dzhung teaches Smith about Tibetan culture and Buddhism. Dzhung urges his eager student to travel to Europe and India to meet other lamas and find more texts to study. A Ford Foundation study grant funds Gene's trip to Southeast Asia.

With letters of introduction from Dzhung Rinpoche, Smith meets many Tibetan refugees as he travels through India, Bhutan and Nepal. In India, he studies with noted lamas and teachers and, in 1968, starts working at the Library of Congress field office in New Delhi. Smith's home becomes an intellectual haven for scholars, writers, government officials and Buddhists of all nationalities; discussion topics include how to save the riches of Tibetan literature. Smith writes essays about the Buddhist traditions and establishes a network for collecting and reprinting important Tibetan texts – a network that spawns many of the world's leading religious leaders and scholars in Asian Studies. A preservation program takes shape.

Smith is in possession of the last known Tibetan official handwritten catalogue of documents and their locations in Tibet. It is used to help identify where monks may have hidden their precious library for safety



## GENE SMITH

and is key to the willingness of Tibetans in India to risk the two-month recovery mission by going back into Tibet to retrieve texts.

A U.S. sponsored cooperative assistance program offered to international allies gives Smith the opportunity to expand his mission. The Public Law 480 initiative (PL480) encourages developing countries to buy surplus U.S. wheat and other agricultural products.

This program becomes known as “Food for Peace” under the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. But funds owed to the U.S. are mounting and blocked currency, such as the Indian Rupee, could not be used for repayment. Because monies had to be spent within the indebted countries to help repay the United States, PL480 is amended to create a kind of “Food for Thought” program. Agencies such as the Library of Congress are directed to purchase publications for the U.S. The catch is that the works must have been printed within the last two years. Smith has a better idea, finding precedent to use PL480 funds to induce wary exiled Tibetans in the Diaspora to expose and then print their hidden woodblocks, faded texts and crumbling manuscripts, and then offering to purchase their enhanced copies.

Smith and his colleagues use the funds to make copies of rare and important Tibetan texts that have been smuggled out of Tibet by exiles of the four main Tibetan Buddhist lineages. He also befriends lamas from the little-known Bon monastic sect – the first religion of Tibet – and assists them with their own preservation efforts. The copies are sent to North America and installed in the libraries of more than 20 universities. These and other texts are also made available to Tibetan monks. Approximately 8,000 Tibetan volumes are acquired under the PL480 program.

Smith also sends back his own notes and essays to be copied and preserved. His commentaries put each manuscript in historical, religious and cultural context for Western scholars struggling to understand the Dharma. The walls of Smith’s home in Delhi become lined with thousands of Tibetan books, even the most obscure of which he can locate immediately amid stacks of texts.

For 20 years Smith uncovers lost Tibetan texts and helps shape the PL480 initiative so that it more directly funds Library of Congress efforts worldwide. When Smith is transferred to Jakarta and Cairo in the late 1980s, PL480 is no longer available, but his growing network continues the mission he initiated in Asia. When more Tibetan Buddhist texts begin appearing in China after the revolution, Smith uses his contacts to acquire those as well, in spite of the dangers involved.



## DAFNA YACHIN

PRODUCER/WRITER/DIRECTOR

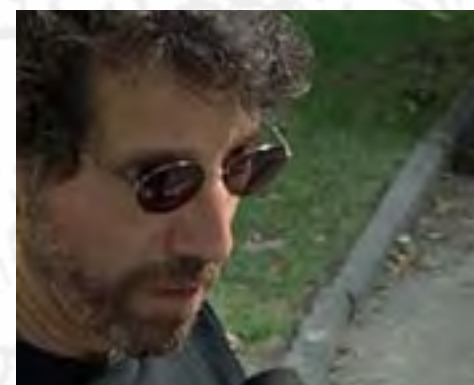
Dafna Yachin is Chief Creative Officer at Lunchbox Communications, a women’s-owned digital media firm. For over 20 years she has written, produced and directed award-winning television, film, national commercials, educational programs and multimedia campaigns. Her projects have aired on CBS, ABC, Discovery, History Channel and SyFy. She has been instrumental in creating lasting series formats for both cable and syndication as well as launching engaging cross-platform initiatives for both NGO and commercial clients. Dafna has an innate skill for identifying talented scholars and creative individuals who are great innovators and collaborators. Partnering with change-makers and production teams in over 30 countries, for the last 10 years Dafna has focused her documentary and online initiatives in the Humanities, Justice and Women’s Rights arenas.



## TIMOTHY GATES

SENIOR EDITORS/WRITER

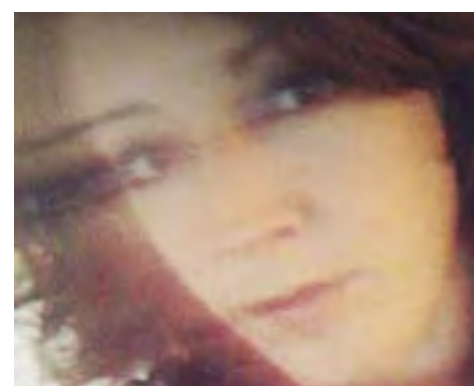
As a Final Cut Pro editor, Tim’s ability to craft a story, even before the script is organized, keeps his dance card full with producers drawing straws. Since joining Lunchbox more than two years ago, Tim has finessed documentaries for the likes of ABC, spun a few national film and HD spots, crafted consumer product DVDs in three languages, and formatted a host of music series for BET. His cross-media and platform knowledge is unsurpassed and he also can compose a mean tune when producers are at a loss for a track with just the right tempo.



## ARTHUR FISCHMAN

WRITER

As a Final Cut Pro editor, Tim’s ability to craft a story, even before the script is organized, keeps his dance card full with producers drawing straws. Since joining Lunchbox more than two years ago, Tim has finessed documentaries for the likes of ABC, spun a few national film and HD spots, crafted consumer product DVDs in three languages, and formatted a host of music series for BET. His cross-media and platform knowledge is unsurpassed and he also can compose a mean tune when producers are at a loss for a track with just the right tempo.



## ANDREA BITAI

ART DIRECTOR

As a Final Cut Pro editor, Tim’s ability to craft a story, even before the script is organized, keeps his dance card full with producers drawing straws. Since joining Lunchbox more than two years ago, Tim has finessed documentaries for the likes of ABC, spun a few national film and HD spots, crafted consumer product DVDs in three languages, and formatted a host of music series for BET. His cross-media and platform knowledge is unsurpassed and he also can compose a mean tune when producers are at a loss for a track with just the right tempo.





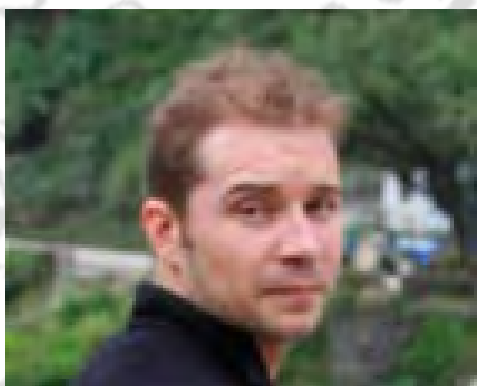
## BILL HARRIS CONSULTING EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Bill is an award-winning, senior television executive with 30 years experience with every major broadcast network (ABC, CBS, NBC and PBS) including the last 16 years as senior Vice-President of Production for the A&E Television networks. He joined AETN in 1993 to manage documentary programming, including the launch of the Emmy winning 'Biography' series. He then went on to help oversee the creation of the History Channel and later, the Biography Channel, Military History and Crime & Investigation, among others, as well as, new media and interactive content. Bill signed on as Executive Producer for Digital Dharma to guide the team both strategically and creatively to help secure the largest audience possible.



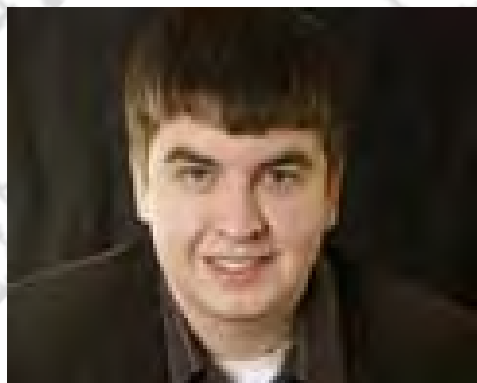
## TAMELA KNAPP PRODUCTION MANAGER

A talented poet and creative writer, as well as a superbly organized and energetic team leader, Tamela spent the past decade as a Top 5 market television news producer. Her television special "The Best Summer Gig Ever" earned Tamela an Emmy™ for Entertainment Broadcast. She has written and produced broadcast documentaries for the prestigious Philadelphia Liberty Medal. Her video work has aired nationally on NBC and CN8, as well as in the Philadelphia local market. Combined with a background in sales and marketing, Tamela's talents are unmatched when it comes to creating engaging video pieces and multimedia communications materials that appeal to the client's target audience.



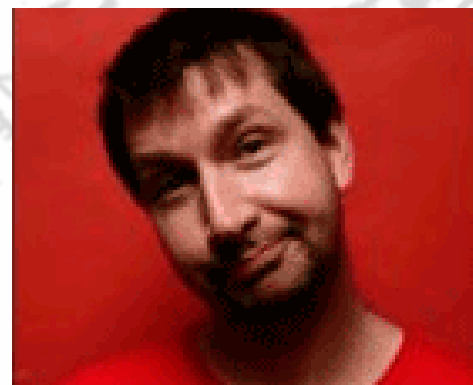
## WADE MULLER DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Wade has over 12 years experience working on a diverse range of Film and HD productions. Wade also has extensive experience working abroad, and is equally at home working on large feature films as shooting observational films. Wade cofounded Red Films Asia, an independent film production company. Their first project was the production of Long Thang (Going Astray), a collaborative film project, installation for 11 screens and feature film, made in Bangkok in 2006. Since then, Muller and Nordanstad have continued to produce, direct and launch new projects. Currently under way is a documentary on Otsuka museum, Japan, and two feature film productions: The Other Heaven, and Gunkanjima. Wade is also an experienced editor/post supervisor with a vast knowledge of major post-production tools and formats such as FCP, REDCINE, Sprite 4k, 2k and HD.



## KEVIN MALONE EDITOR

Kevin has been a Final Cut Pro Editor at Lunchbox for over three years, working on such varied projects as documentaries, commercials, corporate videos, and reality show pitches. He has written, directed, edited and produced promotional videos as well as a documentary trailer. Kevin has also successfully produced a live event at The Franklin Institute. In his spare time, Kevin is the writer, director, producer and editor for personal projects, including a feature-length HD documentary entitled "Christy Mathewson Day" ([www.christymathewsondayfilm.com](http://www.christymathewsondayfilm.com)). A jack-of-all-trades, he has also dabbled in motion graphics animation, lending his talents to 25 videos for Living Beyond Breast Cancer.



## CHIP SCHOFIELD EDITOR

Chip Schofield is a graduate of the film program at Temple University. After graduation he landed a job as a broadcast producer at the Philadelphia advertising agency Red Tettemer. Soon thereafter, Schofield caught the editing bug and was the lead commercial editor for Red Tettemer's clients for over 11 years. He has lent his varied talents to many agencies throughout the Philadelphia advertising community. His client experience includes projects for MTV2, Time Warner Cable, Comcast SportsNet, and The Style Network. Chip was also a producer on the indie feature "Always Will".



## NANDHAKUMAR (NANDU) DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY (INDIA)

A talented poet and creative writer, as well as a superbly organized and energetic team leader, Tamela spent the past decade as a Top 5 market television news producer. Her television special "The Best Summer Gig Ever" earned Tamela an Emmy™ for Entertainment Broadcast. She has written and produced broadcast documentaries for the prestigious Philadelphia Liberty Medal. Her video work has aired nationally on NBC and CN8, as well as in the Philadelphia local market. Combined with a background in sales and marketing, Tamela's talents are unmatched when it comes to creating engaging video pieces and multimedia communications materials that appeal to the client's target audience.



## RAJESH KUMAR SOUND ENGINEER (INDIA)

Rajesh's expertise lies in the coordination of production for different genres. Trained and nurtured over the years under the expert guidance of Nandhakumar, Rajesh has worked with BBC as cameraman. Under his own expert coordination skills, a few projects he's completed successfully includes, Adfilms with Nirvana films, Jack in the Box and Korean Educational Broadcasting.



## SHERNAZ ITALIA AND FRENY KHODAIJI FIXERS (INDIA)

Shenny and Frenny have been working in the world of Film and Television for over 28 years and have covered the gamut of Feature films, Dramas, Documentaries, Commercials, Short Features and News and Current Affairs programs. Their experience and skills in the various aspects of film-making are comprehensive. They are conversant with all film and video formats. The variety of projects they have worked on, have enabled them to observe the work of international and award winning professionals up close and in the process have honed their own skills further. Over time these tasks have included Research, Location scouting, Talent search, complete production management, liaison with government and non-government agencies and finance management. Their very extensive film and documentary Line Producer credits include: "Monsoon Wedding" Director Mira Nair, 2001, "Last Days of the Raj" Carl Hindmarch, Blast Films, Ch. 4, 2006-07, "Paul Merton in India" BBC 2007-08, "Atlas – India Revealed" Director William Hicklin Lion TV, Discovery, 2007, "Man Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag" Director John Hay BBC, 2005, "Take My Job" Wide Angle, PBS/SBS Aus. 2005, "Indira Gandhi–The Killing of Mother India" Director Nick Read BBC 2004, "One Night in Bhopal" Steven BBC 2004, "Octavia Paz" Co-produced by George Lucas. And yes, they always list together and over the years have helped the Digital Dharma team fix everything in India from locations to crew, to archival footage.



## PRODUCTION STILLS



His Holiness shows Gene the only text he had with him when he fled Tibet.



Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche gives thanks to Gene and the new Mac computer over his head that holds 12,000 texts

## PRODUCTION STILLS



Monks at the Bon monastery study the text.



Children on their way to school at the Sherab Ling Monastery, Himachal Pradesh, India

## CONTACT INFORMATION

### **Public Relations**

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Slice Communications  
msorrentino@slicecommunications.com  
215.760.9611

### **Distribution and Screenings**

Danielle Pleines  
Lunchbox Communications  
Danielle@lunchboxcity.com  
610-293-9990 x0

## TECHNICAL INFORMATION

### **Production Company**

Lunchbox Communications

### **Year of Production**

2011

### **Duration Time**

82 min

### **Aspect Ratio**

16x9 (1.78:1)

### **Sound**

Stereo

### **Exact Runtime**

82 min

### **Print Details**

Color + B/W, Stereo