

Thuten Kesang – R.I.P. (1947-2021)

We are heartbroken to share the sad news that Thuten Kesang, OGB 1962, passed away on 23rd. May at 10:45am Auckland time in New Zealand.

Thuten Kesang arrived in India from Tibet after having lost his parents, his country, and his language to the Chinese invasion. But he did not lose his identity as a Tibetan.

"I first came to a place called Kalimpong in Darjeeling which was a trade centre for Tibetans arriving from Tibet. The education that I received in Dr Graham's Homes, is the reason why I am here today. I am here today because of the good grounding, good education and good upbringing in India."

He has been one of the biggest supporters of the Homes having passed through its doors as a student.

Thuten Kesang QSM (Queen's Service Medal) was born in Lhasa, Tibet in 1944. At age 12, his parents sent him to India to study. He was educated, and lived, at Dr Graham's Homes, a Christian boarding school in Kalimpong, near the Tibetan border. Following the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959, the Chinese authorities arrested his father, who subsequently died in prison. This left Thuten la with no funds to continue to pay his school fees. Fortunately, a kindly benefactor stepped in, and enabled him to complete his schooling, and an apprenticeship in printing, on traditional printing presses, in Calcutta.

With the support of the Tibetan Children Relief Society, Thuten la migrated to New Zealand in 1967, the first Tibetan to settle here. He was employed as a printer, until establishing his own printing business in Beach Haven. In 1971 he married his Kiwi wife Gwen. They have two married daughters and four grandchildren.

He continued his work to spread the message of Tibet to the world. Thuten la was the founding chairman of Friends of Tibet (New Zealand), an organization that educates New Zealanders about the plight of the Tibetans, raises funds to educate exiled Tibetan children in India, and provides support to ex-political prisoners who have escaped from Tibet to India.

For his tireless and selfless work for the Tibetan cause Thuten la received the prestigious Peace Award from the Peace Foundation in Auckland, New Zealand. In presenting this award, the Peace Foundation stated that he is "Awarded for lifelong commitment to the principles of peace by standing up for human rights and through work in multicultural education." He is also a recipient of 'Unsung Heroes of Compassion' award presented by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 2009. First Tibetan to arrive and settled in New Zealand in 1967, he has been passionate about helping his fellow Tibetan refugees.

He has also served as President of the Auckland Multicultural Society.

He recently published his autobiography called Tibet - The Home I Left Behind but Will Never Forget, and a documentary was also released based on his life, filmed over a period of 20 years, called Home Away From Home.

But above all he was an OGB who loved the Homes and a pillar of strength and support. His work as the Chairman of the DGH New Zealand Committee has raised funds, sponsored kids, implemented projects across many decades. When the clarion call came for OGBs to get involved and support the Homes in 2014, Thuten la and a handful of OGBs formed the Global OGB Association (GO). He has been a guiding light, a voice of reason and conscience for all of us at the GO Team. He was my Yoda.

Rest in Peace Thuten la. You lived life on you own terms and taught us to do the same.

Anirban Bhattacharryya,
GO Chairman,
23/5/2021