

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #10C – Ama Kalden Chama
July 5, 2013

The Tibet Oral History Project serves as a repository for the memories, testimonies and opinions of elderly Tibetan refugees. The oral history process records the words spoken by interviewees in response to questions from an interviewer. The interviewees' statements should not be considered verified or complete accounts of events and the Tibet Oral History Project expressly disclaims any liability for the inaccuracy of any information provided by the interviewees. The interviewees' statements do not necessarily represent the views of the Tibet Oral History Project or any of its officers, contractors or volunteers.

This translation and transcript is provided for individual research purposes only. For all other uses, including publication, reproduction and quotation beyond fair use, permission must be obtained in writing from: Tibet Oral History Project, P.O. Box 6464, Moraga, CA 94570-6464, United States.

Copyright © 2015 Tibet Oral History Project.



TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #10C
2. Interviewee: Ama Kalden Chama
3. Age: 84
4. Date of Birth: 1929
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Kochak
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: [unknown]
9. Date of Interview: July 5, 2013
10. Place of Interview: Tibetan Community Center of Portland, Oregon, USA
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 44 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Kalden Norbu
14. Videographer: Jeddadiah Emanuel
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Ama Kalden Chama remembers her birthplace Kochak as a small village. She explains that her family was self-sufficient with every need being produced from the land and animals. They wove fabric from sheep wool to make clothing and she describes a certain plant that was used to dye the fabric for monks' robes red. She also relates that there were no nearby monasteries to request prayer services from, but that a local shaman and laymen were called upon to perform these services for the villagers.

Ama Kalden Chama was the youngest among four siblings and lost her parents at a young age. She describes the various types of burials such as cremation, sky burial and water burial. Due to her stepmother's ill treatment, she later moved to her uncle's house. She shares her experience of being married to a man she had never seen after being taken away to his village. She gives us an insight into these marriage traditions, including why many brides are not informed of the family's plans to marry them off.

Ama Kalden Chama recounts the appearance of the Chinese and the capture of her maternal uncles. Fearing for her life, she fled the village with her husband and two young sons and arrived in Shakhumbu in Nepal to start a new life. She had eventually had eight children and moved to the United States in her late 70s where she was free to spend time on spiritual activities.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, childhood memories, farm life, customs/traditions, life as a refugee in Nepal.

TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

Interview #10C

Interviewee: Ama Kalden Chama

Age: 84, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: July 5, 2013

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:15

Interviewee #10C: My name?

Q: Yes.

#10C: Kalden Sangmo.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#10C: Yes, it is alright.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us.

#10C: [Nods]

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

[Interpreter interprets second part of question as: If you wish to answer a certain question, you can tell them.]

#10C: What?

[Interpreter interprets: If you wish to share your experience, you have to tell us, "I want to share a story."]

#10C: Okay. [Laughs]

Q: If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

00:02:42

#10C: [I] do not know if it might raise a problem for the children. What problem would I face at this age?

Q: We are honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in this project.

#10C: Okay.

Q: *Ama-la* ‘respectful term for mother,’ can you please tell us how old you are and where is your place where you were born?

#10C: The name of the place is Kochak. The family name is Kochak Kolo.

Q: How old are you now?

#10C: Currently?

Q: Yes.

#10C: [I] am 84 years at present.

Q: And *ama-la*, how many people were in your family?

#10C: There were father, mother, two older brothers, two older sisters and I.

Q: And then father and mother.

00:04:39

#10C: Father, mother, two older brothers, an older sister and I.

Q: *Ama-la*, where were you in that family, in the middle of the children, at the top or the youngest?

#10C: The youngest.

Q: *Ama-la*, what did the family do for a living growing up in Tibet?

#10C: What? Livelihood?

Q: Livelihood.

#10C: The primary livelihood was agriculture and then rearing goats and sheep, cows, *dzo* ‘animal bred between a yak and a cow,’ horses and donkeys. [We] earned a livelihood by doing such work. The main [work] was agriculture and then there were animals like sheep, goats, *dzo*, cows, donkeys and horses.

Q: *Ama-la*, how big was your village, like how many families were in your area?

00:06:55

#10C: There were four clusters spread around and our area consisted of two big families and 4-5 smaller ones. Our family and another were the bigger families and 4-5 smaller ones.

Q: It's a very small village.

#10C: What?

Q: It's a very small village.

#10C: [Silent]

Q: It's a very small village.

#10C: Yes, small. Located further away were 3-4 clusters spread around. The clusters were small. It was not a city.

Q: What was life like in your family, *ama-la*? Can you describe what your family daily activities were and what you did as a little girl?

00:08:28

#10C: Mother did the household chores. Normally there were hired help that herded the sheep and worked in the fields. Father and mother did the housework while I usually worked in the fields along with the hired helps. [I] wove fabrics like this [points to dress] when there was no fieldwork.

Q: So the family was very self-sufficient and didn't get many supplies from outside of the village or the house where you worked. You made your own clothes, grew your food, prepared your fire and energy supply.

#10C: The agricultural lands sustained us. Then [we] utilized the animals. By weaving the wool of sheep we prepared our own clothes. We were just about self-sufficient. The food came from the fields...

Q: And the clothes...

#10C: The wool of sheep were woven to make clothes and we were just about self-sufficient, not economically advanced but just about sufficient.

Q: Had your family lived in that area for many generations? Do you know how long the family lived in that area?

#10C: What?

Q: How many years did the family live in that area?

#10C: [Silent]

Q: How long had your family lived in that area?

00:12:01

#10C: How many had [we] lived?

Q: How long had you lived in the village?

#10C: [We] had lived for a very long time. After the Chinese appeared...[the family's] still there. After the Chinese appeared, my family was not affected by the reformation. My parents and all the siblings have passed away. My siblings' two children still live there. It has been many years since I left my village.

Q: Was the family there since 100-200 years?

#10C: What?

Q: Was the village in existence since 100-200 years?

#10C: 100-200?

Q: Was the village in existence prior to that?

#10C: The family is very old. It is a very old family. The one called Kochak Kolo is a very old family. It is three, four, five, six generations old.

Q: *Ama-la*, what are some of your favorite memories of growing up in your village? What things that you liked to do as a little girl and what were things that were also very difficult to do as a little girl?

#10C: [I] remember doing wool work like weaving and spinning. [I] learned that and later became accomplished. I engaged in weaving and making fabrics that I liked doing. Besides that there was no education, as it was a village. [We] worked in the fields but that was not every day and wove woolen cloth, which is what comes to my memory. Later [I] spent [my] life doing that. [I] wove that in the Sherpa region and then sold to the Sherpas. [Laughs]

Q: *Ama-la*, the clothes that you made was that a loom where you put the thread?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, yes.

#10C: Yes, it is that on which you do this [indicates using a loom].

Q: You did the...It was from the sheep? Did you shear the sheep and make wool from that?

00:16:28

#10C: Everything came from sheep. The base thread was sheep's wool and the cross thread and all other materials were sheep's wool, sheep's wool. The material for this one [pangden 'traditional apron'] was dyed for color. Whatever [we] used was sheep's wool.

Q: Did you dye the materials for clothing? Did you make dresses in wool or clothing for men, men's shirts and pants?

[Interpreter interprets as: Did all the clothing come from the wool of sheep, for instance pangden...?]

#10C: Pangden, gapay 'striped cloth worn by women around the waist,' chupa 'traditional dress' everything was made from sheep's wool.

[Interpreter interprets second part of above question as: Were clothing for children made from wool too?]

#10C: Children's clothing was also came from sheep. Everything was made from sheep. Clothes for children, for girls and like these [points to clothing] were made from sheep [wool].

Q: *Ama-la*, the monks all wear red wool robes. Where did they get that red color from, the red dye?

[Interpreter interprets as: Most of the monks wear red robes. Were these made from sheep's wool or...?]

00:18:46

#10C: In the early days all these were made from sheep's wool. A thin material called Chenrezig was woven especially for monks' robes. It was a special thin material for monks' robes. Everything was from sheep. Now, of course there are cotton fabrics but earlier the monks' robes, *shamthap* 'skirt-like part of robes' and innerwear were all made from sheep [wool]. All monks' robes were sheep [wool] that were dyed red.

Q: But where did they get the red dye to color the wool?

#10C: In Tibet there was a type of plant called *tsoe* that was ground and mixed with water but these days it is a red powder. It was the *tsoe* that was used in Tibet.

Q: How is the *tsoe* made?

#10C: *Tsoe* comes from Khata. It grows clinging to a tree.

Q: Is it a tree or one that is cultivated?

00:20:38

#10C: It grows as a creeper on a tree, which is gathered and then the [people of] Khata came to sell them to us.

Q: What is the name of the tree?

#10C: I do not know the name of the tree on which it grows. It grows by creeping on a tree and then is sold in bundles but I do not know the name of the tree.

Q: Was it a berry or the bark of the tree?

[Interpreter interprets as: Was it from the bark of the tree or from the leaves of the tree?]

#10C: A slender plant, slightly thinner than this [indicates one of her fingers] winds up the tree. That is plucked and...

Q: Is that the leaf?

#10C: What?

Q: Is that the leaf of the tree?

00:21:43

#10C: No, it is found in Khata. It is not a leaf. It has a slender stem that winds up the tree. That is plucked, dried and brought for sale into Tibet from Beru Khata. ...[not discernible].

Q: And then dye the wool.

#10C: That [dried plant] was powdered and mixed in water. It was ground into a fine powder. [Laughs]

Q: You can extract the color from that bark or material.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: *Ama-la*, who taught you how to loom, to do that?

#10C: What?

Q: The loom...?

#10C: The loom?

Q: Who taught [you]?

#10C: My mother taught [me] to loom.

In Tibet it is always passed from generation to generation. That was how life was in Tibet.

Q: How did you make clothing that was not wool, something that was lighter for in the summertime or in the warm weather?

00:24:16

#10C: [The clothes] were the same in Tibet whether it was summer or wintertime.

My village is very remote. [The same clothes] were worn throughout summer and winter. However, for wintertime there is one called *lokpa*, which is sheepskin. Otherwise, it was the same *chupa* ‘traditional dress/coat.’

Q: What kind of a little girl were you, *ama-la*?

#10C: What?

Q: What kind of a little girl were you?

#10C: [Silent]

Q: What was your nature like as a little girl?

#10C: Everybody used to say that I was good-natured. [I] was generous and gave to others. [Laughs]

Q: When you were a little girl, what kind of dreams did you have about what you wanted to do when you were grown up?

00:26:53

#10C: The aims were just ordinary everyday things like working on the looms and such. However, I was very pious as a little one, generous and a great believer of the dharma.

Q: Was there in your daily life as a growing up as a young girl, were there daily religious practices that you did in the family?

#10C: [People] in Tibet were religious and monks were called to read prayers. Monks from outside were invited on horseback for the monthly *tsechu* ‘prayers performed on the 10th day of a lunar month.’ [People] in Tibet were religious and practiced a lot.

One went to read prayers, conducted *tsechu* and lit many hundreds of butter lamps.

Q: Was there a temple or a small temple near your village? Where did you go to get religious practices?

#10C: There were no monasteries nearby to practice dharma. One must invite a monk on horseback from a great distance like two days away. There was one *ngagpa* ‘shaman’ that

lived close by. He would be invited every year. However, there were many *bazi* in the village to perform rituals.

Q: What's *bazi*?

00:30:03

#10C: [They are laymen] with wives but engaged in ritual practices. They were invited regularly to read *zungdhue* 'collection of Buddhist texts' and many other prayers.

Q: *Ama-la*, can you tell me more about what a *ngagpa* does in the mountains when they go?

#10C: [The *ngagpa*] lived at the Kochak Monastery but [I] do not know what practice [he] did.

Q: What does [he] do?

#10C: What?

Q: What does the *ngagpa* do?

#10D: The *ngagpa* performs the *tsechu* rituals when invited to our home.

Q: What else does [he] do?

00:31:41

#10C: Since I was small then [I] do not know what else [he] does.

[The *ngagpa*] came every year to the village to perform *tsechu*.

Q: What would be...Were the girls in the family treated differently than the boys in your family or were they treated the same by the parents?

#10C: [We were] treated the same. It was the same. My mother was gentle and was very nice to everybody, treated [all] equally.

Q: Did you have thoughts as you got little older, 12, 13, 14...about getting married? Were you thinking about having your own family?

#10C: [I] did not have any desire to get married. My mother passed away early and then father passed away. Then [I] was left with a stepmother. At around the age of 28 [I] went to live in my maternal uncle's village. And then [I] got married. The Chinese appeared after [my] marriage and then [I] had to cross over the mountain pass. [Laughs]

Q: Had both father and mother passed away then?

00:34:22

#10C: They had both expired by the time the Chinese appeared. Both father and mother passed away long before the Chinese appeared.

Q: Around the age of 14, 15, right?

#10C: Yes, mother passed away [when I was] around the age of 14 or 15 and at around 17, father passed away.

Q: Well *ama-la*, before we hear about that story [the appearance of the Chinese], can you tell me what was the cause of your mother's death and your father's death at such a young age?

#10C: Mother passed away due to fever that did not subside. Father suffered from an illness called *bom*. [He] was incapacitated for a long time, which led to water retention. [He] passed from water retention in the body.

Q: You were the youngest child, so were all the other siblings gone from the home? Had they gone and got married and left? Were you the only one left? And were you the only one left?

00:38:12

#10C: Older sister had been given away in marriage. Older brother was not married. After both the parents passed away, a wife was brought home for both the older brothers. And then I moved to live with [my] maternal uncle because of the stepmother.

Q: Were the boys not married then?

#10C: [They] were not married when father and mother passed away. After [their] passing away, a wife was brought home for the two of them.

Q: The daughter...?

#10C: The daughter had been given away.

Q: Were the two brothers nearby in the same village or did they move somewhere else to marry that one woman?

#10C: Who? In my home?

Q: Did your older brothers move elsewhere after marriage or...?

00:39:58

#10C: [The older brothers] lived right at home, lived right at home. Now both of them have passed away.

The Chinese had just about appeared then. All three of them expired from natural causes. I am the only survivor from the family.

Q: What was the reason or the advantage for two brothers to pick, have the same woman, to have one wife? What was the advantage in the culture to do that?

#10C: The tradition was that one [brother] would take care of the internal matters and the other the external. In Tibet it was necessary to have a large family. On account of this, some families bring home one wife for three or two sons. The benefit being that many hands were necessary in Tibet to herd animals, go to serve taxes and perform chores at home. Sometimes three [brothers] take a wife and sometimes two take one wife but the norm in Tibet is at least two. It was like that. [Laughs]. That was in order to have many hands in the house.

Q: *Ama-la*, when you went to live with your aunt and uncle and you were around 17 or 18, was that near your village or far away and what was it like? How did they treat you when you went?

#10C: I was 21 or 22 years old when I left for [my] maternal uncle's home.

Q: How did they treat you?

00:43:47

#10C: Maternal uncle took me because sister-in-law did not treat [me] well. [Laughs] So [I] lived with maternal uncle.

Q: Sister-in-law didn't treat [you] well?

#10C: My two siblings took a wife and the sister-in-law did not treat [me] well. Therefore, maternal uncle took me to my mother's family.

Q: Did maternal uncle treat [you] well?

#10C: Maternal uncle treated [me] well.

Q: Was it far away from your home?

#10C: It was a full day's horse ride. It was almost a full day's horse ride.

Q: When your father died and your mother died, what was the tradition for disposal of the remains? How were the people buried or cremated? Can you just help us to understand what were the traditions to care for someone you loved about after they died?

00:45:54

#10C: Cremation was considered the best and compared to butter lamp offering and then it was water burial. However, had one [died] from a bad illness, cremation and water burial were said to spread infection and [the body was] buried in the ground. The best liked was cremation and then water burial. Burial was considered bad and it was done so only to control the spread of disease. The best liked was cremation and likened to butter lamp offerings, and then it was water burial.

It was compulsory to have a *choepa* ‘practitioner’ at the time of passing away.

Q: A *choepa* is necessary?

#10C: Yes, at the time of passing away and when the body’s being escorted away. A practitioner’s presence was necessary and if one was not available nearby, [he] was invited from a long way. A *choepa* was compulsory at a person’s death.

Q: Wasn’t [a body] offered to vultures?

#10C: What?

Q: Vultures. Wasn’t [a body] offered to vultures?

#10C: What?

Q: Vultures, vultures.

#10C: To vultures?

Q: Yes.

#10C: There are vultures only on the top of Tsipri mountain of Shekar. Only [the bodies of] the precious ones in Shekar are offered to the vultures on Tsipri mountain. There was no way [bodies of] people like us could be offered to the vultures.

Sky burial was considered the best but in our region that was not possible.

Q: So you are describing a water burial, first one; an earth burial if there was a disease; a water burial, a fire burial or a cremation and a sky burial.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Sky?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Sky. Vultures. The body parts would be taken, separated from the body and the vultures would take them away.

Q: Why would the vulture or sky burial be considered one of the highest and most blessed forms of burial?

#10C: What?

Q: Offering to the vultures was best liked. Why was that so?

00:49:40

#10C: It is deemed that one would achieve a higher position after one’s death, that one’s position would rise. I would not know but the practitioners [say so]. Offering [the body] to

vultures would take one higher because vultures live in a high location. That is why it is believed that one's sins are reduced and one would reach a higher position.

Q: *Ama-la*, was that unusual for someone to lose mother and father at such a young age? Did that happen to many Tibetan children or was that just by chance for your family?

#10C: What?

Q: Your father and mother passed away at a young age. Did this happen only to your family or does it happen to many Tibetan families?

#10C: It happens to many; there are all types. Some people live long and some had stepmothers at a young age, while some were orphaned as babies. There are many types.

Q: What feelings did you have after you lost not only your mother but then your father? What were you feeling in your heart?

00:52:26

#10C: [I] felt a tremendous amount of sadness. [Laughs]

Q: Did you find any Tibetan Gods that were very helpful to comfort you in your...?

#10C: [I] had a stepmother.

Q: The question is, when your parents passed away were you able to have holy lamas perform rituals?

#10C: Yes, [I] did very much. I told you earlier about a shaman. [I] invited him. He was an *ngagpa* that did not practice wrathful rituals but performed the gentle practice. [He] was known as Kochak Donkonpa. There are some shamans that practice wrathful rituals but he was not one that indulged in such practices. [I] invited him for both [my parents' death rituals] and it was very good.

Q: We're going to move along and just ask what happened after you move in with your aunt and uncle and you are at that point 17, 18? What happens during the next 10 years? Can you give us a kind of a story about what happens from 17 to when you get married at 28?

#10C: [I] was 20 when I lived with maternal uncle.

Q: What's been the experience like in the 10 years?

#10C: What?

Q: [You] lived in maternal uncle's home for 10 years.

#10C: In maternal uncle's home? Yes.

Q: Were [you] happy during the 10 years or what happened during the period?

#10C: [Silent]

Q: [You] lived in other people's home.

#10C: Yes, maternal uncle's home.

Q: Were you happy or unhappy in those 10 years or what was it like?

00:55:43

#10C: The work was difficult but [the family] treated me well. [The family] treated me very well. The workload was heavy and extremely difficult but [I] was happy. [Laughs] My maternal uncle's was a rich family, almost like a country. The work was difficult but [they] treated [me] with love. [Laughs]

Q: And then when does your life begin to change in a big way?

#10C: What?

Q: When did your life change in a big way?

#10C: It changed from then on. [Maternal uncle] said, "You should continue to live here and I will bring home a husband." I refused, "I will not stay here. It is not possible for everyone to live under one roof. I will not remain here but live separately." My mind had changed and I did not accept the offer. Then I married [my husband] near the mountain pass. [Laughs]. [I] had arrived near the mountain pass.

Q: What's the place?

#10C: What?

Q: Which is the place [you] moved to?

00:58:26

#10C: Where my maternal uncle lived?

Q: Yes.

#10C: It is called Nyishar Sharlungwa.

Q: [You] lived in Nyishar Sharlungwa for 10 years and then...?

#10C: Then to the one called Kyapra.

Q: Did [you] marry then?

#10C: Yes, [I] married at Kyapra.

Q: Was the bridegroom brought home or...?

#10C: What?

Q: Was the bridegroom brought home or what happened?

#10C: [I] went as a bride [to my husband's home].

Q: First of all, was that unusual for a Tibetan woman to not be married by 28, 29?

00:59:51

#10C: In Tibet one married at various ages. Some married at a very young age and others much older. Some married even before reaching 20 while some married at 30. [Laughs] There were many variations.

One did not marry until one reached the age of 20 or around about 20.

Q: When you went to that place to get married, had somebody picked you a husband or did you go there to find a husband? I didn't follow that.

#10C: [I] was sent away in marriage to my husband's village from maternal uncle's home. [I] was given some clothes and then given away. [Laughs] [I] was escorted on horseback from my maternal uncle's home. There was drinking of *chang* 'home-brewed beer' for 2-3 days. [Laughs]

Q: Were you aware [that you were getting married]?

#10C: [I] was not aware. Some are aware and sent away on horseback called *thapsu* while others are unaware and told that they were going elsewhere and sent [to the place of marriage]. Hence, [these girls] go unaware. I was not aware and was told [I] had be going to Rongsha...[not discernible]. [Laughs]

Q: Do you think they don't tell the girl that she's getting married because they are afraid that she will run away or is there some other reason?

01:03:22

#10C: Yes, because [she] may run away, as there are some that run away. [Laughs]

Q: What's the reason for not being aware [of the marriage] in the beginning?

#10C: The reason is that some that are aware are escorted grandly on horseback, which is called *thapsu*. Some are not told [of the marriage] but that [she] will be visiting this place or that. And at the venue of the wedding [she]'s told, "You are being given here." There are many girls that run away. [Laughs]

Q: What's the reason for keeping [the marriage] a secret?

#10C: I do not know what the reason is. What is the reason?...[not discernible]. [Laughs]

01:04:54

Marriages in Tibet normally happened either by being given away in secrecy or being aware and given away in *thapsu* style. There were not many love marriages in Tibet. It was always arranged whether it was being given away in secrecy or in the *thapsu* style of riding a horse. There were none where you met and fell in love.

Q: *Ama-la*, how did it feel when you found out that you were going to be married to somebody? What was your thinking and your feeling? And there was a couple of days of celebration before and then you were getting married. How did you feel about this man that you had never met before?

#10C: [I] was sort of dazed and there was no particular feeling. [Laughs] A person [I] had not seen...[laughs]...one [I] had not seen at all. [Laughs]

Q: But were you feeling ready to get married?

#10C: What?

Q: Generally [you] had reached the age of 28 and were you ready for marriage?

01:07:46

#10C: There was no preparation from my side. However, the one seeking [the bride's hand] and the one giving [her] away would have discussed. The seeker would have asked to be given...

Q: Did you feel in your heart, "It's time I got married." Did you wish to be married?

#10C: One had reached the right age and there would be a wish. [Laughs] [I] had almost reached the age of 29. [Laughs] One would wish to settle down in life.

Q: So what was your husband like when you met him and what did you think of him?

#10C: [My husband] was not bad. Around a year after marriage when I returned [to my village], the Chinese had invaded Lhasa. A year after marriage when [I] returned home as is the tradition in Tibet, the Chinese had taken over a great part of Shekar. When I returned a year after marriage, during autumn of that year the Chinese had taken control of Shekar and the news was everywhere. My maternal uncle, a *ngatsab* 'deputy leader,' had fled with his two children.

Q: What was the husband like?

#10C: What?

Q: Was your husband a good man?

01:10:15

#10C: [He] was a very good man. The father of my children has passed away, but [he] was a very good man.

Q: What was the first time you heard about the Chinese coming and did you ever see any in your area... Maybe I better first ask, when you got married, what was the name of the place where you began to live and then is that where you saw Chinese people for the first time or Chinese soldiers?

#10C: The village was called Kyapra. Kyapra Chama is the name of the family.

Q: That's one and secondly, the Chinese started to appear after [your] marriage in Kyapra. Did the Chinese appear in Kyapra then or not?

#10C: The Chinese were staying at Rowongsha. The Chinese were not doing anything then.

Q: [The Chinese] were in Rowongsha?

#10C: Our village was located on the way to Rowongsha and so the Chinese sought rooms to stay overnight. So 3-4 Chinese stayed at the neighboring...

Q: Was this during [your] escape journey to India?

#10C: What?

Q: Was this during the escape journey or when was it?

01:12:27

#10C: That was just when Shekar was occupied, when the Chinese took control of Shekar. The Chinese had also appeared in Dhingri. At that time the Chinese were on an inspection tour of Rowongsha and so, 3-4 Chinese sought rooms with the people of Kyapra who fed them. The Chinese did not act badly.

Q: So what happened *ama-la* that made you want to leave, with your husband? You know you said you were worried about what was going to happen but nothing was happening to you. You just wanted to leave because it was dangerous?

#10C: The reason for leaving? The reason for leaving was because my maternal uncle was a leader and Shekar was occupied. The Chinese had confiscated the dormitories of the Shekar Monastery and maternal uncles—there were two maternal uncles—both had been taken away by the Chinese. I was a part of their family and fearing the Chinese might do something, I fled to the land of the Sherpa.

All my maternal uncles are no more and [their properties] confiscated. Only one son survives while the Chinese has ruined the home. The family members have passed away except for one son and the home is in ruins.

Q: When you did the escape, *ama-la*, who went with you? Did your husband go with you and where did you land when you got to Nepal? What city or area?

01:16:29

#10C: Everyone was there. There was mother, *aku* ‘paternal uncle’ who is mother’s younger husband and called *aku* in Tibet, then my children’s father, the children’s paternal uncle, their younger sister, me and my two children. There were many people. [We] drove all our cattle and sheep to Shakhumbu across the Mangola pass. Then all of them died due to *salok* ‘illness from change in altitude.’ [Laughs] It was the *salok*.

Q: What’s *salok*?

#10C: *Salok* means [the animals] had been driven from Tibet to the lower regions and became affected by what’s called the *salok*. [They] did okay in summer but gradually by spring all the cattle and sheep died.

Q: Due to change in climate?

#10C: [The animals] could not adjust to the new place. There were many people though.

Q: What was the problem with the temperature that caused the death?

#10C: What?

Q: What caused [the death]? Was it due to change in place or what?

01:18:29

#10C: It is called *salok*, which is not being able to adjust to the place. There, it was Tibet, and here [altitude] lower. It was said that [the animals] were affected by the *salok* and perhaps the grass was also insufficient. The grasslands were not as expansive as in Tibet. So by springtime all the sheep and cattle died. There were a few yaks that were left in Tibet. Then there were difficulties [laughs] working for the Chinese.

Q: You mentioned “my family and my two daughters.” Did you have children before you left from Tibet?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Maybe I made a mistake about that.

#10C: [I] had children born in Tibet. One could just about walk and the other was around a month old when [we] fled in fear.

Q: Were both girls?

#10C: Boys.

Q: Two boys?

#10C: Two boys. One could walk and the other was a month old. [We] fled due to fear of the Chinese.

Q: How long did the journey take from Tibet to go to Nepal?

#10C: What?

Q: How long did it take?

01:20:54

#10C: To come to the land of the Sherpa?

Q: Yes.

#10C: [We] reached in two...three days. [We] walked slowly as I had given birth and could not walk much. [We] reached the land of the Sherpa in three days.

Q: To Shakhumbu?

#10C: To Shakhumbu.

Q: So you were pretty close to the border. The town where you had married was very close to Nepal.

#10C: What?

Q: It was quite close.

#10C: It was close but one had to cross a snowy pass, a snowy pass that had cracks. It was quite close and one could cover the distance in two days. One must journey through snow.

Q: And then *ama-la*, how long did you stay in Nepal and where did you finally settle down with your husband?

01:22:50

#10C: [I settled down] in Shakhumbu in Nepal.

Q: It was Shakhumbu.

#10C: [We] rented a place from a Sherpa and settled in Shakhumbu and worked for the Sherpa. All the five children I have now were born in Shakhumbu. [We] rented a place and worked for the Sherpa [laughs], weaving, ...[not discernible] and digging potatoes. ...[not discernible].

Q: *Ama-la*, when you went to Nepal what were some of the things that happened to you that you remember?

#10C: [I] was very happy upon reaching [Kathmandu?] Nepal. My older son said, “*Ama*, you have worked very hard in the past. Nobody in Nepal wears woven clothes but fabrics and there is no fieldwork. The stove is electric and since you do not know how to operate it, it is dangerous. So you should chant *mani* ‘mantra of Avalokiteshvara’ during the day and circumambulate the stupa in the morning and evening.”

So I did not need to do any work since then. [I] have been practicing the dharma, chanting every prayer that [I] know. [Laughs]. [I] have received teachings from Tushi Rinpoche. [I] am only engaged in practicing the dharma and told [by the children], “Do not do any work.”

[I] have completed the *ledho* hundreds of thousands of times.

Q: What’s *ledho*?

#10C: *Ledho* is completing 100,000 prostrations...[I] completed 1,100,000 prostrations during the *ledho* and 300,000 *mendal* ‘offering to one’s spiritual master, in which one visualizes offering the entire universe and its precious contents.’

Q: How many 100,000 prostrations?

01:26:25

#10C: 11 and 300,000 *mendal*; 1,100,000 *yigya* ‘hundred syllable mantra’; 300,000 *lamay neljor* and 300,000 *semgay*. [I] completed such during the *ledho*, and have visited all the pilgrim sites in India. It has been very good. [Laughs]. [I] have been to the pilgrim sites of Bodh Gaya [Bihar] and in the south. They are marvelous [places].

Q: When you jumped from having two little boys when you went to Nepal and how many children did you have altogether?

#10C: Altogether eight from whom three sons passed away, the two oldest and the last but second. Currently, [I] have four sons and a daughter.

Q: Currently [you] have four sons and a daughter?

#10C: Four sons and a daughter.

Q: Did two pass away?

#10C: Three passed away, three sons passed away.

Q: Initially [you] had eight.

#10C: What?

Q: [You] had eight children.

#10C: [I] had eight, seven sons and a daughter. Three sons passed away.

01:30:09

[I] had the opportunity to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama three times. It has been very fortunate.

Q: You have had many challenges, many sorrows and many joys.

#10C: It has been great since [I] arrived in Nepal. There were no problems since then. [I] did not face any great problems, but it was mainly on account of hard work for one requires sustenance. It has been great for me since arriving in Nepal. [Laughs]

[I] have been in a foreign land [United States] for five years and have enjoyed great health.

Q: Before you came to the United States were you living in Nepal all this time?

#10C: What?

Q: Did you live in Nepal before coming to the United States five years ago?

#10C: Yes, [I] lived in Nepal, lived in Nepal for many years.

Q: Where did [you] live in Nepal?

#10C: What?

Q: Where in Nepal?

01:31:55

#10C: [I] lived in Nepal.

Q: At Bouddha?

#10C: At Chavir.

[I] lived for many years in Nepal. [I] was able to do all the dharma practices after coming to Nepal, like meeting lamas, accumulating the *ledho* and everything.

Q: *Ama-la*, since you are the mother of so many children, what advice would you give to the next generation of Tibetan children? What do they need to do and to think about as they grow up?

#10C: The children?

Q: Yes.

#10C: Do not lose the tradition of Tibet and have faith in the dharma. [I] tell the children at home, “Speak in Tibetan. Continue to do what the elders are doing and see that Tibet’s tradition is not lost; having come to an English speaking country, you can speak in English anytime. Have faith in the dharma. You know a little of the Tibetan scriptures, so do not forget it.” [I] tell them such things. Besides that, I do not possess intellect to say more. [Laughs]

Q: *Ama-la*, why do you think it’s useful for the old people of Tibet to share their stories like you did today?

#10C: What?

Q: [You] have told your story regarding the preservation of the dharma and culture. What is the main reason for preserving the culture?

01:35:34

#10C: [You] mean what is the reason? I do not understand that.

Q: [You] told your story about how farming is carried out in Tibet and about weaving that are so important. It’s important to talk about how one leads life. What have [you] to say about those?

#10C: [You] mean what have [I] to do about that?

Q: Why is it important? Why is Tibet’s dharma and culture important?

#10C: It is important because you are a Tibetan having arrived in a foreign country and the Tibetan culture is being lost. I think one should see that it is preserved. [I] have no other understanding besides that.

Q: Thank you *ama-la* for your time and help today in sharing this story of Tibet with us.

#10C: [Nods and laughs] There is not much substance in my interview.

Q: I think every story is important.

01:37:25

#10C: [I] am happy if it is so.

Q: I’m going to ask you as I did in the beginning. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

#10C: I would not know today if there will be any problems.

Q: Will you face any problems?

#10C: What?

Q: Do you have any reservation in showing [this interview]?

#10C: I cannot understand it.

Q: Will there be any harm if [the interview] is shown in Tibet and elsewhere?

#10C: [Silent]

Q: Will there be any problem for you?

01:38:25

#10C: I do not know about that. I do not know if that will happen or not.

It is just one's life story. It is about how one worked in Tibet long ago. There may not be any problems.

Q: Can we use your real name for this project?

#10C: My name? [I] do not know; it should be okay.

Q: Thank you for sharing your story.

#10C: It should be fine.

Q: Are all your children here?

#10C: What?

Q: Are all your children here in the United States?

#10C: Not here.

Q: Are the children in the United States or where else?

#10C: What?

Q: Are the children in the United States or where?

#10C: There are children in Nepal.

Q: Not in Tibet?

#10C: Not in Tibet. My daughter, [her] children and paternal uncle live in Nepal.

Q: It's okay if they are in Nepal.

#10C: There will be no harm [if they are] in Nepal?

Q: There'll be no harm in Nepal.

#10C: Will there be no harm if the children happen to go to Tibet?

Q: No. However, I'll tell [the interviewer].

#10C: One must make sure.

01:40:16

Q: Thank you for sharing your story with us.

#10C: [Laughs]

Q: Two quick ones if you don't mind. If you could tell or share any advice with the world what would that be from her life perspective?

#10C: [I] have nothing to say. [Laughs]

Q: Why is it important for the people of Tibet to find compassion and forgiveness for the Chinese government?

#10C: For the Chinese people?

Q: Yes, Tibetans are spiritual and do not cause harm to the Chinese.

#10C: Yes.

Q: How much has it benefitted the Chinese people?

01:42:08

#10C: [I] did not follow that.

[Interpreter interprets as: The benefit for the Chinese is that we do not attack them. They are benefitting from our compassion. It's about that.]

#10C: I see, for the Chinese.

Q: What do you think?

#10C: What?

Q: What's your opinion?

#10C: My opinion is, [I] wish [we] could gain independence at the earliest through peaceful way. I pray, “May [we] gain independence during the lifetime of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.” That is what [I] pray for and feel in [my] heart that [we] gain independence soon during His Holiness’ lifetime. That thought is there. I pray for it and retain it in [my] heart.

END OF INTERVIEW