

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #13N – Samten
April 9, 2015

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #13N
2. Interviewee: Samten
3. Age: 81
4. Date of Birth: 1934
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Rekhe
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 9, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Norbu Sangpo, Boudha, Kathmandu, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 16 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Dhiraj Kafle
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Samten was born into a family that farmed lands and raised a huge flock of sheep, yaks and horses in Kham Province. Starting at age 8 he grazed animals along with other children. Then from age 10 to 12 he was enrolled in Markongshi Monastery to learn to read and write. As a young adult, he ran away from home to Lhasa to see the Jowo, a statue of Buddha Shakyamuni.

Samten left Lhasa after two months and went to stay with his sister in Konpo, where there were many soldiers of the *Chushi Gangdrug* Defend Tibet Volunteer Force. He decided to join them but was captured by the Chinese en route. He was imprisoned inside the Norbulingka Palace for five months. After which he was forced to labor on construction sites and then logging at Kongpo from where he escaped to India. He settled in Assam, India, but the region was attacked by the Chinese in 1962 and all the Tibetan refugees were forced to flee again.

Samten enrolled in the Indian Army, but was instead taken with a group of Tibetans for training in the United States. He described being trained in weapons and communications while in the U.S. for three years. He was then deployed in Tibet to photograph and report on the Chinese. His two colleagues were captured but Samten escaped back to India and was sent to work in Nepal. His life turned a full circle when Dudjom Rinpoche advised him to practice the dharma and he became deeply involvement in spiritual pursuits.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, childhood memories, herding, life under Chinese rule, imprisonment, forced labor, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India, resistance fighters, CIA training.

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Interview #13C

Interviewee: Samten

Age: 81, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 9, 2015

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:15

Interviewee #13N: My name is Samten.

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?

#13N: Yes, [you] can. This is very good.

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

#13N: Okay. I am very happy that you are doing this interview. Thank you.

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.

#13N: Okay.

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

00:02:11

#13N: I do not have any problems. The Chinese are our enemies and I am happy if the Chinese see this, as I am causing harm to the Chinese. I am happy and not scared.

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

#13N: Okay.

Q: *Pa-la* 'respectful term for father,' can you please tell me where you were born?

#13N: My hometown is called Rekhe.

Q: And what was the nearest monastery or temple to your home?

#13N: The monastery in our hometown was called Markongshi. There was a monastery. Then there was another one called Rilamgon, Rilamgon. Rilamgon was the seat of Karthok Rinzin Tsewang Norbu. Karthok Rinzin Tsewang Norbu was born in our region. [He] was slightly related to us.

Q: I see. *Pa-la*, what year were you born?

#13N: The birth year...

Q: How old are you now?

#13N: [Reads from note] [I] think it is 1935, '35.

Q: And today how old are you?

00:04:45

#13N: Now I am 81 years old.

Q: When you were born what kind of work did your family do for a living?

#13N: My family consisted of two parts, farmers and nomads.

Q: Can you tell me...do you have any memories of your childhood, what it was like?

#13N: My parents used to send me to graze animals as a little child.

Q: What kind of animals were you looking after?

#13N: We, the nomads, owned around 500 sheep, 100 *dri* 'female yaks' and yaks, and then 12-13 horses and mules that were reared by the nomads. Is it okay to describe more or should [I] answer in brief?

Q: Of course, whatever is easier. Did you enjoy herding and have many adventures?

00:07:26

#13N: This was when [I] was a child. The weather was extremely cold and hence, your legs become cold and [I] have suffered so greatly that I cannot forget.

Q: Did you not have warm enough shoes? Is that what happened that you were troubled by the cold?

#13N: There were woolen covers for the upper portion of the legs and underneath was leather. Fearing that the leather sole would become wet in water, one removed the shoes. Once you were on the other side of the river, stones stuck to your feet. The weather was incredibly cold. Then the moustache on a person froze. Such was the cold weather.

Q: Your family, were they well off or medium income, what was your economic status?

#13N: How?

Q: In terms of wealth status, was the family among the rich, middle class or poor in Tibet?

#13C: We were among the rich. The middle class owned only around 200 sheep and 50 cattle, while the poor possessed only around 100 sheep and 40-50 cattle.

Q: *Pa-la*, were there other children in the family and how many?

00:10:36

#13N: There were five sons and four daughters from the same set of parents.

Q: Where were you in that lineup?

#13N: I am the youngest.

Q: As the youngest child, how were you treated in the family?

#13N: The family members loved me very much as the youngest child. The nomads had meat, butter, cheese, curd and milk to consume.

Q: Do you have any favorite memories of your childhood?

#13N: Happy memories...to be honest there were no schools in our region. Since there were no schools to attend, [we] stayed home with the parents herding animals. There was not any other work besides that.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents like what kind of a person was your father?

00:12:48

#13N: Father's name was Lobsang. He oversaw the cultivation and nomadic work. He was kindhearted and good. [He] constructed a fine prayer wheel in the place called Dholha Nangsi. [He] was spiritually inclined. There was no trade whatsoever. It was not the practice in our region.

Q: What about your mother? Can you tell us a little bit about your mother?

#13N: Mother was very kindhearted and very loving to the children. As a child when I came home [I] called out to mother and if mother wasn't home I did not enter. Mother loved me very much. Mother was good.

Q: At what age were you out taking care of the animals in the mountains, in the fields?

#13N: [Laughs] One must go at around the age of 8 or 9. There is a saying that when teeth fall off at the age of 8, that is the time when one is old enough to graze animals. That used to be said.

Q: What kind of a little boy were you? Were you shy or adventuresome? What kind of a child?

00:15:30

#13N: Oh, I was extremely naughty as a child. There were no balls, so [I] made round mud balls that [I] rolled around. We had neighbors in the village on whose walls...no, wooden homes—[I] flung stones, ran and hid in my house. [I] was so naughty. It seems I was very naughty. Then [I] fought a lot with other children. [Laughs]

Q: How did your parents respond to your, you know, misbehavior? What did they do?

#13N: The parents would beat [me] if [I] fought with the children saying that [I] should not fight. However, as a child I used to fight when meeting other children.

Q: With the hands or stick, how did they beat you?

#13N: [My parents] did not beat with a stick but slapped a little bit. [They] did not beat very harshly.

Q: So does anything dramatic or significant happen in your childhood that you would like to tell us about?

00:17:39

#13N: Nothing significant happened. Since there were no government schools in our region, I went to the Markongshi Monastery to learn Tibetan. While I was living there to study Tibetan, I used to miss mother towards evening and cried. [I] used to shed tears. I went to learn Tibetan, as earlier there were no other schools. [I] was around 11 years old then when [I] went to study Tibetan. It was in a monastery.

Q: How long did you stay there, *pa-la*?

#13N: [I] studied Tibetan for around two years and then could read and write Tibetan well.

Q: Did your parents encourage every child to go and learn Tibetan or was that unusual for your family?

#13N: That cannot be for certain. Some parents sent [their children] to learn Tibetan and some did not, but sent [them] to graze animals and do other work. [They] did not have much interest in education.

Q: Why do you think your parents had interest in your education?

00:20:17

#13N: My father is somewhat brainy and he felt that if not any other education, [his] son should learn Tibetan.

Q: And so how old were you when you actually went to school for those two years? What years were they in your life?

#13N: [I] was around 10 years old then and studied until the age of 12.

Q: What happens in your life after age 12? What are some other things that happened?

#13N: And then the nomadic animals...

[Discontinuity in interview]

Q: What happened after the age of 12?

00:21:50

#13N: Except for herding nomadic animals in the region, there was no custom in the region of doing trade or of opening stores. There was not much work except caring for the animals and consuming the animal products as I told you earlier. [We] lived there consuming these products.

Q: What happens in your adolescence? Are there any adventures or experiences that happened that you can tell us about?

#13N: And then as [I] grew older, wishing to go to Lhasa to have a glimpse of the Jowo 'statue of Buddha Shakyamuni' I ran away to Tibet [Lhasa] without the knowledge of the parents.

Q: By Tibet [you] mean...

#13N: Lhasa. [I] came to Lhasa to see the Jowo.

Q: I wonder how old you were when you ran away from home to see the Jowo in Lhasa?

00:23:40

#13N: [I] must have been reached the 20s then. I spent around two months in Lhasa to see all the pilgrim sites like Samye and Dayappa.

Q: For people who don't know, could you tell us what you meant by wanting to see the Jowo? What is the Jowo?

#13N: From the Buddhists' point of view the Jowo is extremely precious. It is like the heart for all Tibetans and [they] felt very happy to see it.

Q: Why did...?

#13N: [Interrupts] The Jowo was given as dowry to the Tibetan King Trisong Detsen [?] when [he] married Chinese wife Kungjo from China. It is incredibly huge, made of bronze and very holy.

Q: When you said you ran away from home, was it not possible to get your parents' permission to go before you went on pilgrimage?

00:26:08

#13N: [The parents] just would not allow. Our village was located in a remote area and going to Lhasa and other places meant that the son would not return or would die. The parents held [me] dearly and would not let go. It was the same with all the people of our village.

Q: How did you know about Lhasa? Where did you hear about the Jowo and all these various sites? How did you find out about that?

#13N: When people that had been there spoke about it, [I] thought in [my] mind that [I] must to go to Lhasa and see the Jowo. There were many people who had been there and returned to the hometown.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about the journey like did somebody go with you? How long did it take and did you have any adventures on the way?

#13N: When [I] went to Lhasa I traveled together with a person from my hometown. When [we] reached Chamdo [we] approached a wealthy family called Pondhatsang who had great connections with our *dheruphakor* [possible translation: 'father's relatives from the village'] and told him, "I am going to Lhasa to see the Jowo. Please arrange to send me in a vehicle." He paid the fare and send [us] in a vehicle. Vehicles were plying then.

Q: Who helped?

#13N: Pondhatsang, the leader of Pondha.

Q: How did you happen to know this wealthy person from Chamdo?

00:29:14

#13N: We had the *dheruphakor*, which is an incredibly large group consisting of over a thousand people. Everyone was related to each other and one happened to be on very friendly terms and in close contact with Pondhatsang. The leader of Pondha told me, "Do not go to Lhasa. Go back home." [I] replied, "I wish to go [to Lhasa]. Please help [me]." Then [he] sent me in a vehicle.

Q: Why did your family think that people...why did the village think that if you went to Lhasa you would die?

#13N: Once one left from there no one returned. If one did not return, for the family it was like losing the person. So unless one secretly left there was no way permission would be given to leave.

Q: Did you know how to drive a vehicle or were you given a driver?

#13N: No, the leader of Pondha paid the fare for a Chinese vehicle and sent us to Lhasa.

Q: Can you tell us what your first impressions were when you saw Lhasa?

00:31:44

#13N: [I] felt very happy to see the Jowo in Lhasa. However, [I] felt very sad because having lived all along in the village home, there was no house here and no money to stay in hotels. [I] did not feel happy.

Q: What happened next?

#13N: Then after spending two months [we] came to Kongpo. There are the farmers and the nomads in [our] village and [I] was not able to talk about the farmers. It would not be correct to do so now?

Q: Sure. Yes.

#13N: We had both farmers and nomads [in the family]. The fields produced five kinds of grain, five different types of grain. One, wheat; two, barley; three, buckwheat; four, peas and five, *sowa* ‘coarse, thick-shelled barley.’ The farmers produced these. The three types of vegetables produced were turnips, radishes and potatoes. Apart from these, there were no other productions. The produce from the fields was consumed and from the nomads there was meat, butter. So there was plenty to eat and drink.

Q: Why do you think it’s important for me to know about this source of food? Why do you think it’s important?

00:35:13

#13N: That is because you are asking what [we] produced in the village and what [we] ate. So if you understand the produce from the farmers and the produce from the nomads, you will know how we earned our livelihood.

During summertime all our family members became nomads and stayed at the nomadic site for around three months. When it turned cold in winter [we] came down to the farming site and lived there. If the family had enough members, they took care of the animals and should there be no one to do so in the family, servants were hired to herd the animals.

Q: Is there anything else, *pa-la*, you want to tell me about the livelihood of your family?

#13N: That is it about the livelihood. Making use of resources from both the nomads and farmers, it was sufficient to make a decent living. Other than that there was no trade or journeying long distances to bring food products.

Q: So the families were very self-sufficient.

00:37:49

#13N: Yes, it was. One could eat well because there was plenty of meat and butter available with the nomads and the five types of grains from the farmers provided *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ and bread. It was great living and completely satisfactory.

Q: We left you in Lhasa. I’d love to know what happens next.

#13N: After two months in Lhasa [I] went to Kongpo.

Q: What did you do there?

#13N: I had a younger sister in Kongpo with whom [I] went to live. [Laughs]

Q: What was it like?

#13N: Generally, there were plenty of resources for food and drinks in Kongpo. One could avail all the five types of grains and the region had good resources. My sister who had met a man from Powo had set up house and was quite well off. I was poor having come from the village and lived with them. [I] ate and stayed there.

Q: Continue. What happens now in your life?

00:40:07

#13N: Then after that having rebelled against the Chinese, a great many soldiers of the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] arrived in Kongpo. [To interpreter] Please translate that.

Then I thought I must join the *Chushi Gangdrug* soldiers and fight the Chinese. So I went to where the soldiers of the *Chushi Gangdrug* were stationed.

As I was on the way to where the *Chushi Gangdrug* was, the Chinese were pursuing the *Chushi Gangdrug*. I encountered a large number of Chinese soldiers and fell into Chinese hands there. [I] was caught by the Chinese.

Q: The Chinese were in pursuit. Like were you walking or on a horse going to join them? How were they pursuing you?

#13N: [I] was going on horseback. I was on horseback along with a colleague when we encountered the soldiers and were captured by them. [We] were taken to Lhasa, to Norbulingka in Lhasa.

Q: Wow! What did you feel when that happened and you got captured by the Chinese?

00:42:35

#13N: When captured by the Chinese there was great fear thinking what [they] would do. However, even if there was dread, the men had caught [you] and there was nothing to be done.

Q: You can narrate longer...

#13N: Oh, okay. And then [we] were taken to Norbulingka, which you would know as a place where His Holiness the Dalai Lama relaxed. In there were the lame, blind, old men, old women and children that had been captured by the Chinese. It was crowded. The garden was filled with people. I thought these blind, lame and children cannot have been imprisoned and wondering why I asked, "Why are you in here?" When asked they told me that the Chinese had captured them and that they were prisoners. I was a prisoner too and we were imprisoned together in Norbulingka.

00:44:48

A little away from the Norbulingka [I] could see burnt remains and ashes. When asked about these, it was said that after the Norbulingka was shelled, around a hundred bodies of men that had been killed were cremated there. The Dalai Lama had already escaped to India. Otherwise, believing that the Dalai Lama was in the Norbulingka, they [Chinese] had shelled Norbulingka. [The Chinese] shelled and bombed it. A large number of people had been cremated there. Kerosene was poured and [the bodies] cremated together.

During the incarceration the Chinese told us that the reason the Chinese came into Tibet was because the Tibetan Government had bound Tibet and that they were the Liberation Army, which had come to liberate us. They claimed to have come so that Tibetans would have happiness. And also talked about the three leadership categories, Tibetans [leaders/the wealthy?] that had caused suffering and about not having established schools, about the sufferings caused to the people, and that they would treat the Tibetans well. [The Chinese] gave such propaganda lessons day in and day out. [They] gave propaganda lessons and taught songs.

00:47:26

At that time in Tibet all the men of the aristocracy and wealthy families were captured and imprisoned. Their wives were given white hats to wear and made to remove excrement. Labeled as the ruling class, they were not allowed to meet with other Tibetans or to speak. Such things were created.

Q: Were you seeing this? I mean, if you were a prisoner in Norbulingka, how did you know this was happening?

#13N: Though [I] was a prisoner, people we knew came to bring food there and they said that such things had been done.

Q: Did you know why you were put in prison and how long you were going to be there?

#13N: One would not know at that time. [I] have some more things to talk about. [I] will speak a few words about the last topic. After all the monasteries had been destroyed, lamas imprisoned and men of the wealthy families put in jail, they [the Chinese] took away their possessions like gold, silver and finest quality images. Then the other things in the homes were distributed among the people. I was told these happenings by a woman called Assen that used to bring me food.

Q: What's the name of the woman?

#13N: It is Assen, Assen. Assen used to bring me food once a week. We were related. She lived in Lhasa.

Q: How long were you in that prison?

00:51:07

#13N: Then they kept [me] in prison for five months giving such propaganda lessons. After five months, since we had not committed any serious crimes against them, there was relaxation. It is said that those that had committed serious crimes were imprisoned and not allowed to work. After five months I was sent where houses were being constructed for Chinese soldiers in Lhasa. [Laughs]

Q: What was that like, that experience?

#13N: The experience or working for the construction...in the four directions soldiers armed with machine guns kept watch. All the workers there were prisoners and trying to escape would mean being shot dead by them. One was forced to work. The food was a sack of *tsampa* that was kept there and some black tea. The black tea had only salt and no butter. One ate the *tsampa* and drank tea and worked a day.

Q: A day?

#13N: A day means working from morning until evening.

Q: Do you think your family had any idea, *pa-la*, about what happened to you? Did they even know you made it to Lhasa? Did they know you'd been imprisoned? How was that sitting with you? How were you handling that?

00:53:54

#13N: [The family] never heard anything. Except for believing that I was in Lhasa, [they] heard nothing. At that time there was no motor road from our hometown and there were not many people that traveled. I never heard whether the parents were well or not. It was not known.

Q: So what happens next in terms of your imprisonment and how do you get out of there?

#13N: And then [I] was sent from Lhasa to Kongpo. [I] was taken to cut trees in a forest in Kongpo Guntsang with just a barbed wire fence around it and guards in four directions. [I] was forced to work there splitting logs.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: “I was sent to...” I missed that word.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Taken from Lhasa to Kongpo.

Q: Taken from Lhasa to Kongpo, as a prisoner?

#13N: It is called Kongpo Guntsang.

Q: Were there many prisoners that went with you, *pa-la*?

00:55:50

#13N: Except for another person that was captured with me, except for the two of us no one else was sent there. Others continued to work at the construction.

At Guntsang were a great number of prisoners working. We were kept together with the large group.

Q: What were the conditions like?

#13N: There cannot be any good conditions but bad in a prison. One just about survived solely on *tsampa*. There was not any meat, butter, vegetables, nothing. They provided only tea and *tsampa* to the prisoners.

After arriving in Kongpo I had the thought of escaping. It was now easy to escape. It was easy to go to India from Kongpo. So I told my colleague, “Hide a little bit of *tsampa* every time [you] eat. Save a little bit of *tsampa*, which we will eat when we escape.” He saved a little bit and I saved a little bit. [We] were able to save this much *tsampa* [makes a large ball with fingers].

00:57:56

#13N: And then one day carrying the little bit of *tsampa*, we ran away in the night through the barbed wire fence. [We] succeeded in escaping. [We] succeeded in escaping from there.

That day we went to my younger sister with whom I was living earlier. [I] requested my sister to provide some meat and *tsampa*. [We] found four other colleagues and then fled towards India.

That day [we] crossed the Bagala pass between India and Tibet and reached the place called Michukha. Now [we] had left Tibetan Territory and reached Michukha in India. The Indians had set up an office at Michukha to help the Tibetan refugees. [They] lent very good assistance by giving *tsampa* and medicine.

[We] were kept there for around 10 days. After 10 days... During the escape journey we were on horses. We managed to get horses and the four men were riding four horses. Leaving the horses and saddles there, as the route was not possible for horses, [we] set off on foot.

Q: *Pa-la*, what was in your mind when you were a prisoner and then when you succeeded in escaping? What were you thinking about doing? What were you hoping for?

01:01:22

#13N: Until [I] reached Indian Territory there was fear and panic thinking [I] might get caught. Once in Indian Territory [I] was extremely happy that now I will get to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama and need no longer remain under the Chinese.

Q: So what happened to you next, *pa-la*?

#13N: Have [you] noted the part about going on foot?

Q: Now [you] were on foot...

#13N: Yes, and then [we] reached Missamari [Assam], which is Indian Territory. At Missamari the Indian Government had constructed huge bamboo houses with an aisle in the middle and sleeping areas on both sides. A great many refugees continued to arrive. [The Indian Government] had built houses with sleeping areas on both sides and a passage for people to walk in the middle. Around 20 people cooked food that had been supplied. Very good arrangements had been made for food, drinks and medicine here.

Such was the great arrangements but it was incredibly hot. Perhaps those from the villages of Tibet had eaten stale food and lacked hygiene, as everyday 3-4 people died and were cremated there.

01:04:12

Seeing people die like this I thought if I stayed there I too would die. There was dread in [my] mind. After around 20 days the Indian Government issued refugee permits. [I] received one. After [I] received the permit I ran away to Kalimpong. [I] did not stay there among the refugees.

Q: Why Kalimpong?

#13N: Kalimpong is located on a mountain. Because of the altitude it is not hot, which was the reason [I] went there. There was not any other objective.

Q: What happened there to you?

#13N: On reaching Kalimpong I [met] two men I knew, one from Markham and another from Gonjo, who were financially sound. I was poor for though I had brought a great many Tibetan 100 currency notes, [these] were just papers there and could not be used. So [I] went with the two of them to Nepal with merchandise. They took me along to trade.

01:06:35

We came to Boudha [Kathmandu] and I was the one that sold the goods in the area around the stupa. I was the one assigned to do the selling because I was poor. Both of them stayed indoors while I sat there to sell the merchandise. [We] could not sell the merchandise for six months and remained there for the period.

Q: Is it the Boudha stupa here?

#13N: Yes, the Boudha stupa here.

Q: What kind of goods were you selling, *pa-la*?

#13N: The goods were what Tibetans wanted like *jaril* ‘round-shaped compressed tea leaves,’ *bagchung* ‘compressed tea-leaf bricks,’ shoes and different kind of fabrics. Such items moved there, which they had bought for the shop. By shop [I] mean sitting on the street.

Q: This became a job? Did you get a commission or were you paid to do this by these traders?

01:08:27

#13N: No. The principal amount for the merchandise was theirs, but it was decided that the profit would be divided into three parts and since they were economically better, I was to serve them and sell the wares on the streets. At that time I had a gold ring weighing four *tola* [approximately 12 grams] brought from the village. Both of them advised, “It is better you sell the gold. Sell it to buy merchandise.” So [I] sold the gold. A *tola* of gold fetched only 225 *rupees* then! Then I had a *dzi* ‘special bead made of agate stone’ given by Mother, a 3-eyed [one] that was thick like this [indicates index finger] with corals on either side. I brought this from my hometown. I sold the *dzi*—that brought me only 200 *rupees* while nobody would buy the corals! [I] have suffered a great deal.

Q: How long were you doing...you said...how many months? Six months you were selling, acting as a trader?

#13N: Yes, six months.

Q: Then what happened?

#13N: [We] managed to sell the goods in six months. After selling the goods [we] bought pig bristles and musk to take back to sell in India.

Q: Pig bristles?

#13N: Pig bristles fetched a good price.

Q: Pig bristles and...?

#13N: Musk from musk deer. [We] bought musk and returned to India.

Q: It sounds like you decided to continue trading instead of, I don't know, going back to Tibet or joining the *Chushi Gangdrug*, which you had planned to do?

01:11:30

#18N: Yes, and then from there it gradually reaches the point when I go to America. After reaching India and having sold the musk and pig bristles and [deducting] food and other expenses in Boudha for six months, [I] received a profit of just 80 rupees! Each one earned 80 rupees. There was hardly any profit! [Laughs] The only profit was having had your board taken care of.

Q: You're laughing because...?

#18N: [Speaks before translation] And then I went towards Assam in India where I opened a restaurant in Rangapara. [Laughs]

[I] managed the restaurant there. Then in 1962 the Chinese attacked India. At a place called Bomdila, which is on the Tibetan border, there was a large number of Tibetans running shops. When the Indian Army arrived, they took their merchandise and fled.

Q: Indian Army?

#13N: No. When the Chinese army arrived, the Tibetans carried their merchandise and fled. Bomdila is located at the Tibetan border.

01:13:50

The merchandise [they] brought could not be transported on trains, as the trains were packed with people fleeing. They left a huge amount of stuff in my restaurant saying, "If this can be of any use to you, please give me half the price later. If it is of no use, nothing can be done." They piled and left the merchandise in my restaurant. [They] suffered immensely.

Q: And then?

#13N: I could not remain there after three days. The reason being that the poor Indians banded into groups and started raiding. Fear of being looted, I left all the restaurant items and fled. [Laughs]

Then once again with just the body...the provisions, cookware and cutlery in the restaurant were worthless and [I] escaped with nothing but the body. Then [I] reached Guwahati on the other side of the Ganges River. [I] left behind all the merchandise they left in [my] safe keeping. [Laughs]

01:16:06

#13N: Once in Guwahati, the Indian Government had pitched tents there. All the Indians and Tibetans living that side had fled fearing the Chinese. Tents had been pitched for their

stay and the arrangements were very good. All the boys and girls studying in colleges served [the escapees] and arrangements were very good. I stayed with the others there in Guwahati.

Then when we were at the banks of the Ganges, rich Indian families brought blankets in trucks and distributed one to each of the people. Each of the escapees was given a woolen blanket.

Q: And then?

#13N: While we were there, Tibetan Government officials arrived. The Tibetan Government officials said, “If any one among you wish to join the Army in Dehradun, [we] will register the names.” Now the part about [my] training finally begins.

01:18:05

Then I thought, “[I] was imprisoned in [my] country. Having come to a foreign land, once again [I] am forced to flee. If there is a chance to fight the Chinese, [I] must enlist into the army.” [I] registered with them and decided to join the army.

That day [I] reached Siliguri. At Siliguri those Tibetans that had enlisted to join the army underwent physical examination to test whether they were fit to join the army or not. After a thorough examination...A large number of people had registered and 139 men were chosen from among them and taken to Darjeeling. We were not deployed into the army but taken to Darjeeling. At Darjeeling it was said that [we] would have to go to train in America.

[We] were around two months in Darjeeling during which period, [we] were given lessons in written Tibetan and such. Two months later [we] were put in a plane and taken to the United States of America.

01:20:20

And then on the way to the United States, [we] were two days in the country of Japan, two days in Japan. After that [we] were taken to the United States to...I do not know the name of the place.

It was in 1962 that [I] went to the United States. [I] arrived in the United States in 1962.

Nobody was allowed in where we were living in the United States. The house here had heating and air-conditioning. The arrangements for food and drinks were excellent. There was plenty of milk to drink, plenty of fruit to eat and plenty of fruit juice to drink. There were eggs and excellent food and drinks. Food was so good that for instance, a piece of square-shaped butter was brought for breakfast. After the men had eaten as much as [they] wished, the left over was dumped in the garbage for there was no practice of saving it. We were astonished thinking it must be a very rich country.

01:22:55

There were Tibetans that served as interpreters. What the instructors said was, “[You] have to go to Tibet and set up secret organizations there. Groups of 4-5 men must go into every region to bring all Tibetans into the organization. Then the United States will lend assistance by providing weapons, money and whatever is required.” [I] trained in 32 different secret aspects.

Q: Different trainings?

#13N: One trained in different aspects. [We] were given training in around 32 different aspects.

Q: Can you tell us some of them?

#13N: The main thing in setting up a secret organization is that whatever orders are issued from the top, it has to be carried out. When a secret organization is being formed in Tibet, each person should see that the other does not know about it or who the leader is. The main training is about setting up an organization in Tibet. Following that was training to fire *mendha lintu* and then...

Q: *Lintu*, pistol?

#13N: *Mendha lintu* is the small one which [we] were trained to fire, and then firing a machine gun, firing artilleries, firing different guns. [We] were given training in such.

Q: *Pa-la*, can I just interrupt and ask, where were you when this...where was this training taking place? Do you know the name of the place or did you call this place by name?

01:26:22

#13N: [The instructors] would never tell us the name of the place. I still do not know the name of the place where we trained. [They] never revealed it.

Let us say that is it about the training part. The Tibetan Government and the United States took us there with the plan to airdrop us in Tibet to form secret organizations. For this [we] were taken to the United States and trained. However, India did not approve of the airdrops in Tibet and refused to allow it. When [India] did not approve, we had to spend three years there, as [we] did not have anything to do. When the plan to drop us in Tibet was shelved, it was decided that [we] would be sent to lead the Tibetan Army in India. So 36 men were given leadership training. I was among the leadership trainees and told that [we] would have to go to the army in Dehradun.

Q: How many men?

#13N: Thirty-six.

So that was the reason we were in the United States for three years without anything to do. Then we were sent to India in 1965. After arriving in India, along with three colleagues [I]

was informed that I would have to go to Tibet from Michukha to set up secret organizations. [We] were sent to Tibet.

01:29:45

When we were training there, an American called Gregory was training [us] in sending *thar* ‘wireless messages.’

Q: Yes?

#13N: *Thar, thar. Thar* is to make connections.

Q: Radio?

#13N: It is not radio.

Q: Wireless?

#13N: It is to make connections. We call it *thar*, to send messages. He was giving training to make connections between the office and I.

Q: Who was?

#13N: Gregory.

Q: Was that the person’s name?

#13N: Yes, that is an American name. Gregory.

Q: When you were trained, *pa-la*...when you were trained in Colorado by the U.S., you had to stay three years because the Indian Government wouldn’t give permission to the American Government to drop you into Tibet, but they gave permission for you to come to India and train Indian soldiers who were fighting the Chinese?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Tibetan soldiers in the Indian Army in Dehradun.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: They were allowed to come and do that.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: And then I thought that you said you were training...then you were going to go, to train the Tibetan soldiers in Dehradun and send them into Tibet?

#13N: [We] were to be sent to the army. When [we] were going to be sent to the army, Tibetan soldiers in the Dehradun army remarked, “We do not want American-trained leaders. Our leaders will be Indian-trained and we do not want American-trained leaders.” We could not go into the army. Since [we] could not, [we] were being sent to Tibet. That is the truth.

Q: The Tibetan soldiers didn't want American-trained?

01:32:31

#13N: The Tibetan soldiers said so. Tibetan soldiers said, "We want Indian-trained leaders here and do not want American-trained leaders."

Q: Why was that?

#13N: That could be because they liked leaders that were trained in India and not those trained in the United States, but I would not know. That was their attitude.

Q: But before you trained to do that in India, for those three years what was the experience like for you to work with the American military? How was that experience? What did you feel about your trainers and how they were treating you?

#13N: The experience was that [the American instructors] gave very good training and we had no other thoughts but to be ready to sacrifice [our] lives for the cause of Tibet. Irrespective of where we died or fell sick, [we] were determined to go to Tibet and establish secret organizations. "The Americans are certain to extend help. This is incredibly good. So it matters not where we die as long as we can go to Tibet to establish secret organizations." [We] were filled with great enthusiasm.

Q: *Pa-la*, can you remember the names of any of the American trainers?

01:35:04

#13N: I do not know the names. [I] do not know the names.

Q: Did you know...?

#13N: The foremost is an office established in Delhi consisting of the United States Government, the Indian Government and the Tibetan Government that administered us. She [interviewer] must know about this.

Q: Where? Is it in Delhi?

#13N: Yes, in Delhi.

Q: What, an office?

#13N: There was an office established in Delhi that consisted of officials of the United States that helped us, officials of the Tibetan Government and officials of the Indian Government. They were the ones that issued directions to us.

Q: I heard that some of the Tibetans trained were given special names by the Americans. Did you happen to get such a name?

01:36:20

#13N: Yes, all new names. The 136 Tibetans that left from here did not use the Tibetan names and were given American names.

Q: What name were you called by?

#13N: My name was Stuart.

Q: Stuart.

#13N: Stuart. S-T-U-A-R-T [Laughs]

Q: Mr. Stuart.

#13N: [Laughs]

Q: Nice to meet you.

#13N: [Laughs]

Q: You don't remember the names of any of your teachers? Does the name Bruce Walker...Bruce? Bruce Walker?

#13N: Oh, Bruce! Bruce, I know the name. Walker, he was one of the instructors. Actually different instructors came to give different trainings. Many instructors came. Yes, Bruce. Bruce served the longest time.

Q: What did he teach you?

01:37:55

#13N: I cannot recall clearly what he taught.

Q: How did the Tibetans and the American soldiers get along?

#13N: [Speaks before question is translated] I think Bruce is someone that oversaw the work because he remained the longest. New instructors kept coming. We were trained in bomb making.

Q: Bomb making. What about radio? Did Bruce help you with radio?

#13N: Radio meaning sending wireless telegraph?

Q: Yes.

#13N: Sending wireless messages? Yes, [we] were trained in that. We went to Tibet and sent wireless messages to the office.

Q: When the Americans told you that you might have to sacrifice for your country in this mission, how did you feel about that that you might have to die to save Tibet?

#13N: “[I] have no regret dying for it is for the cause of the Tibetan people. I do not mind dying.” We had such enthusiasm. Whatever work was ordered, [we] were determined to carry it out and never had the thought of not doing it. When dropped from the planes...[we] were dropped from planes. Many were dropped from planes.

Q: I want to hear about that experience, but if 136 Tibetan men were sent to train in America, are there any of those men still living besides yourself that you know about?

01:41:13

#13N: I do not know much, but the Chinese captured a large number of men. Many were killed and there were only around 40-50 left. That is what I think.

Q: *Pa-la*, do you know if any of them are still living?

#13N: I know that there are three in Kathmandu. There is Phenpo Bhula, Phenpo Bhula and another one in Boudha. The three of us, I have seen only three in Nepal.

Q: So Phenpo Bhula and the other names you don't know?

#13N: I cannot remember the name of the other person. He is in Boudha.

Q: Okay. Thank you, and then please go on with your story. You were going to go train the Tibetan army but that didn't work. And so you...what happened then?

01:43:11

#13N: While going to Tibet...taking along three men to Tibet, [I] went to upper Kongpo and approached a family. The one called Gregory, who was a wireless operator, was left at the border. Leaving the wireless operator there, we then approached a family in Tibet. [We] had been told that this family would provide us with information and food. If provided with food and information, [we] thought we would stay in Tibet and then sent films of photographs and written information about the Chinese to him [Gregory]. We asked Gregory, the wireless operator to reach us in one month with the wireless set.

Q: Where was the wireless message sent?

#13N: We needed the wireless set to relay information about the Chinese to the office in Delhi. Gregory was the trainer and the wireless operator. We stayed there for a month. We informed Gregory about the place to meet [us] in a month. However, the Indian Government did not give permission and Gregory could not come to meet us.

Q: In Tibet?

#13N: [Gregory] did not come to Tibet and so we returned to India.

Q: At which border was Gregory?

#13N: It is Michukha in Indian Territory, Michukha. From Michukha [we] had arrived in upper Kongpo.

01:45:56

#13N: Then we came back. After having returned to Michukha, in the year 1966 an order came from Delhi asking me to go to lower Kongpo in Tibet along with Gen Terry and Map.

Q: Who? Gen...?

#13N: It is Terry. Gen is a Tibetan word. His American name was Terry and the other one was called Map.

Q: Map?

#13N: Yes, Map.

Q: Were they Americans?

#13N: What? They were Tibetans, Tibetans that were trained with us. They were sent to assist me. Map was a wireless operator and Gen Terry was a messenger.

Q: Did this order come from Delhi?

#13N: An order came from Delhi. Map and Terry were sent along with me to Tibet.

Q: Terry?

01:47:22

#13N: These are American names.

Q: Were these American names, they were actually Tibetan people?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Correct.

Q: Okay. Terry and Map. Under order Terry and Map were to go to...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Go to lower Kongpo in Tibet.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: And Stuart.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...and Stuart were to go to lower Kongpo.

Q: And do what?

#13N: We were to go to Tibet as planned by the American and Tibetan Governments, stay in Tibet and establish secret organizations of the Tibetan people. That was the main reason. [We] were going there to establish secret organizations.

01:48:26

Then there is a place called Jorchen at the Indian border where there's an Indian post. Leaving Map there, I went to Kongpo taking along Terry.

Q: The Indian border...?

#13N: [We] went to a place called Jomo Zong in Kongpo.

Q: Where?

#13N: Jomo Zong.

Q: Jomo Zong. What's the name of the place at the Indian border?

#13N: The name of the border...

Q: ...where Map was left.

#13N: It is called Jorchen. Jorchen is the name of a place where there is an Indian post with a small number of soldiers.

01:49:33

When [we] reached Jomo Zong, I approached a man called Sonam Wangchuk who lived in Kongpo. He accepted that if we stayed there he could supply us food and information and help us.

Once he accepted, [I] thought [we] could stay in Tibet, stay in Tibet and establish a secret organization. Then [I] sent Gen Terry to India with films of photographs taken of Chinese military camps and information about Tibet. Having sent Gen Terry, I stayed there alone for three months.

Q: Sent films of photographs?

#13N: What?

Q: Photographs...?

#13N: Films.

Q: Sent films back?

#13N: Sent films of photographs. When Gen Terry was leaving, [I] apprised him of the place he should meet me in three months. Then [I] sent Gen Terry to India, to Jorchen where Map was waiting.

Q: Can you say what city in Tibet?

[Interpreter to Interviewer]: Jomo Zong.

Q: What were you doing while you were in Jomo Zong?

01:51:41

#13N: One must hide in the forest in Jomo Zong. Since there was not anyone you could trust well, one remained in the forest to scout for Chinese military camps, take pictures; meet Sonam Wangchuk who supplied me with foodstuff and information. Through the information [I] learned that the people of the region were ardent believers of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and very enthusiastic. I felt very proud that I could establish a big organization there. I relayed the names of 80 people, 80 enthusiastic people in a letter to the leaders in Delhi asking if I could enlist them in the organization or not.

Then the officials of the American, Indian and Tibetan Governments in Delhi dispatched the items we needed but the Indian border officials did not give approval until three days short of three months. Then my colleagues Terry and Map received permission. Therefore, the two of them did not have time to take a detour to avoid Chinese military camps and took the direct road in a hurry to meet me and were captured by the Chinese.

01:54:52

And then I waited alone at the place where [we] were to meet in three months but they did not appear, as they had been captured by the Chinese. [They] had been captured by the Chinese and could have brought Chinese soldiers who would have easily captured me, but both of them were very fine men. [They] never revealed I was there and did not let me be caught. Had they told the soldiers about meeting a colleague at such a place, I would have been caught. However, they never disclosed it. They are like this [raises right thumb].

Now I could no longer remain in Tibet when my colleagues did not arrive. I returned to India alone. The Himalayas consist of great snow covered mountains and [I] sank into the snow. Had it not been for the pack on the back, I would have fallen into a snow pit. I survived and gradually made it to India. It was autumn time and there was a lot of snow.

As Map...no, as Terry spoke the truth, [he] was not killed but was imprisoned for 17 years. That is my colleague Terry who was imprisoned for 17 years. Map did not tell the truth. After 17 years in prison, Map was released and issued a passport. [He] came to Nepal where we met. Map came to Nepal after 17 years in prison and we met.

Q: Wasn't it Terry who was in for 17 years?

01:57:39

#13N: Yes, Terry was in for 17 years.

Q: And Map?

#13N: Map's in prison.

Q: Still?

#13N: No, no. [To interpreter] First translate that Terry was in for 17 years; then the Chinese issued [him] a passport and [he] came to Nepal.

After [he] came to Nepal, I asked Terry. Map was in prison. [To interpreter] It is a long story. So translate this to her first.

Q: *Pa-la*, what were you carrying...? First of all, you were alone for three months in the Himalayas, in the mountains?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, in that place Jomo Zong.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: At Jomo Zong? In India?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, in Kongpo.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I mean in Kongpo.

Q: And you were by yourself and...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: When the colleagues did not come to the appointed place, then he left to go into India and on the way passed through the Himalayas.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: On the way?

Q: What were you carrying in that pack?

01:59:11

#13N: Who? When I came?

Q: Yes.

#13N: [I] was carrying a gun, a pistol and then a camera, a compass and around 100 bullets. So the things [I] carried weighed around 15 kilograms, and then a little bit of food. [I] had to eat. Except for a few clothing, one could not carry much.

[Discontinuity in interview]

#13N: [I] have a little more to say.

Q: *Pa-la*, do you want to tell us about Map? Is that what...?

#13N: Map was our radio operator. He was captured and put in prison. While he was in prison he sang, “Arise, arise, people arise, let us drive out the imperialist Chinese from Tibet.” [He] sang such songs. One day the Commander of the army interrogated him in a room...

[Discontinuity in interview]

#13N: [Part of interviewee’s statement is missing. The following is taken from the interpreter]: ...There were two Chinese soldiers that tied him up and took him outside. And there was the Chinese army Commander that was interrogating him and he [Map] was threatened with guns. When they did so, he picked up a piece of brick and threw it at the Commander who fell down. And then the two soldiers, they caught him, tied him up with his legs and hung him day and night. When he was almost dead, then they called, gathered all the prisoners, the soldiers, the locals and then they announced that Map is one who had been trained in America.

Q: Tell us about Map, please.

#13N: [Speaks before question is translated] Should [I] begin now?

Q: Yes.

#13N: What?

Q: Yes. [You] spoke earlier about prisoners, soldiers and the public being called to gather...

#13N: [They] were called and told, “Map is a notorious man. [He] received training in the imperialist country of America, then snuck into Communist China to spy and nearly killed our Commander. [He] has committed such acts. Therefore, we will execute him and you are to watch it.” A pit was dug a little further away in an empty land. Then Map was taken to the edge of the pit. His arms were tied with ropes and stretched out by two men; a dark spot was marked in the center of his chest and then [he] was shot and flung into the pit. It is said he was buried and killed.

02:03:03

Now [I] will sum up the story. I have a sister in Kongpo who the Chinese said I might visit. [I] heard that for two years Chinese soldiers took turns at night to watch my sister’s house. But I did not go there, so [they] were not able to capture me. [To interpreter] Please interpret this.

That is it and then I went a third time to find out how Map and the others had been captured and I managed to return successfully. At that time India was doing everything to stop secret organizations being set up in Tibet. I understood that they did not like the idea of establishing secret organizations. [To interpreter] Please translate this.

Then the Americans and the Indians disagreed and the office was closed. When the office in Delhi was closed the Indians told me, “You should work for India. We will give you the rank of a head constable.” I do not know what it is but [they] asked me to work for India and that I would be given the rank of head constable.

02:05:12

However, I did not work for India. [I] had no desire to work for India.

Then the Tibetan Government sent me to Nepal. I think it was in 1969. In the year '69 [I] was sent to Nepal. My responsibility was overseeing the work of the Chinese and Taiwanese in Nepal. Taiwan and China.

Q: Overseeing?

#13N: To find out what they were doing against the Tibetan Government. I had to spy over them.

Then [I] served the Tibetan Freedom Committee here. Now [I] will sum up. After that Kyabje Dudjom Rinpoche called me and said, “It is very difficult to take birth as a human. Hence, having taken the birth of a human, if one cannot practice dharma, it is useless possessing vast amount of wealth and properties like a king. Wealth and properties will not be beneficial for one must even leave the body and depart. So practice the dharma.” Kyabje Dudjom Rinpoche advised me.

02:07:45

And then my mind transformed towards spirituality. [I] did some business and other activities in Nepal and faced no problems in survival. Then I requested Jadrel Rinpoche, “Please allow me to go into retreat for three years and three months.” Jadrel Rinpoche said, “Wait for a year or two and [I] will do so.” Then along with Jadrel Rinpoche’s daughter I went into retreat for three years and three months in Yulmo. Now I spend time doing practice and do not indulge in politics. My story is over now. [Laughs]

I managed to construct a fine *mani* prayer wheel at Swayambhunath. Then at Pharping a 13-foot image of Guru Rinpoche made of copper...When I told Jadrel Rinpoche that I wished to commission such an image, he said, “People commission many images of Guru Rinpoche in temples. If [you] desire to commission an image of Guru Rinpoche install it at a roadside so everybody can see it. Install an image of Guru Rinpoche and *benza guru burdho* ‘mantra engraved on stones or other materials.’ Whoever views the image and the *benza guru burdho*, they will benefit.” So I managed to install a 13-foot image of Guru Rinpoche there.

Q: What’s *benza guru burdho*?

02:10:14

#13N: That is *benza guru* ‘mantra: *Om ah hung vajra guru Padma siddhi hung*’ engraved on copper. *Burdho* meaning it is engraved. “Having this [the mantra] engraved and the

image at the roadside will be beneficial to all that see them,” [Jadrel Rinpoche] said. So I managed to install these. That is my life story and I do not have anything more to say.

There is a lot to talk about the dharma but let us stop here today.

Q: One question—what do you think has been the most important teaching of the dharma for you? What has helped you change the direction of your life?

#13N: Initially, when one begins to study the dharma one must accumulate the *bum-nga* ‘five-hundred thousand’ in order to cleanse the body from negative thoughts and actions.

Q: I see, in order to cleanse negative thoughts and actions?

#13N: Yes. While accumulating *bum-nga*, one must perform *kyabdo* ‘refuge prayers,’ *semkyay* ‘cultivation of an enlightened attitude,’ *yigya* ‘100-syllable mantra,’ *mendel* ‘mandala offerings,’ *dorse* ‘vajrasattva’ and *chabum* ‘100,000 prostrations’ of guru yoga. I accumulated these during the retreat. Then after that, every three years...after every three years...[I] will not say much. Every three years the Buddhists have what is called the *semtri* ‘mind-teaching,’ which the lamas give us. *Semtri* is what the mind needs to do...

02:13:27

After accumulating these for three years, there is the *semtri* that is given. *Semtri* is about what the mind is like, how to experience the nature of mind...

When the lama gives the pointing-out instruction, that is when one is introduced to the real dharma. So if one observes that well...if a Buddhist observes that well, one will be in a state of *thukdham* ‘remain in meditation after death’ upon death and sit upright. And then some attain the body of rainbow light in which case the body disappears completely. Then in some cases the body shrinks to a tiny size. The Buddhist religion has awareness on such things.

I have received all empowerments, oral transmissions and spiritual instructions from Dudjom Rinpoche, Jadrel Rinpoche, Palyul Penor Rinpoche, Taklung Tsetrul Rinpoche and Dungse Thinley Norbu. I feel that losing Tibet...the Chinese invading Tibet and our escaping has been a blessing in disguise because after coming here I have had the opportunity to see holy lamas and received such wonderful teachings. Considering it a blessing in disguise, I am happy today.

Q: We are very, very happy to have heard your story. You’ve climbed many mountains and the greatest one of all is the dharma.

#13N: Yes.

Q: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW