

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #15D – Dolma Choezom
May 20, 2012

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 © 2014 Tibet Oral History Project



TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #15D
2. Interviewee: Dolma Choezom
3. Age: 88
4. Date of Birth: 1924
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Ganzi
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1951
9. Date of Interview: May 20, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, Mcleod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 21min
12. Interviewer: Martin Newman
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Dolma Choezom was born in Ganzi in Kham Province. This region of Tibet was under Chinese rule and taxes were paid to the Chinese rather than Tibetan government. Dolma Choezom's father was a trader and traveled to nearby Chinese cities to buy tea in the form of bricks, which he then sold in Tibet. She fondly remembers awaiting his return because he brought candy for the children. She talks about games she played and festivals that she enjoyed as a small child.

Communist Chinese first appeared in Ganzi when Dolma Choezom was 12 years old and she recalls people fleeing to the mountains, though the Chinese did not do anything oppressive during their first arrival. Her mother died when it snowed heavily on the mountain where they were hiding. Dolma Choezom was then cared for by her grandmother and aunts. She decided to run away to Lhasa when she was 20 years old. She describes the difficult journey on foot that took two months and her embarrassment begging for food. Dolma Choezom visited pilgrim sites around Lhasa and Shigatse.

Dolma Choezom then met her husband, a soldier in the Tibetan Government army and lived in the army camp passing time by knitting sweaters. She describes the birthing process of her seven children, which was done at home often without help. She and her husband chose to visit Kolkata, India, but they instead ended up in other parts of India and never returned to Tibet because in the meantime the Dalai Lama had fled to India in exile.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, childhood memories, customs/traditions, first appearance of Chinese, pilgrimage.

TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

Interview #15D

Interviewee: Dolma Choezom

Age: 88, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Martin Newman

Interview Date: May 20, 2012

Question: Please tell us your name.

00.00.13

Interviewee #15D: Yes?

Q: Please tell us your name. *Ama-la* ‘respectful term for mother,’ what is your name?

#15D: My name? Dolma Choezom.

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

#15D: Should I relate the story of my childhood?

Q: Yes, that is right. A question will be asked, and *ama-la*, please answer it.

#15D: [Nods]

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

#15D: [Smiles and nods] Okay.

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know.

#15D: Okay.

Q: If you don’t want to answer a question or talk about something, also please let me know.

#15D: Okay.

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

00:02:40

#15D: [Smiles and nods to indicate 'no']

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

#15D: [Nods]

Q: *Ama-la*, can you tell us where you were born?

#15D: Ganzi. It is Ganzi. [My] actual birthplace is Ganzi.

Q: How many people were in your family?

#15D: Yes?

Q: *Ama-la*, when you were a child in Tibet, how many members were there in your family?

00:03:30

#15D: We worked as farmers. I was small then.

Q: How many family members were there?

#15D: Chinese?

Q: No, family members.

#15D: There were many family members: my mother, four sisters and two brothers. We were six siblings.

Q: Did you have six siblings?

#15D: Yes, that is right.

Q: I see. And your parents.

#15D: Yes.

Q: What did your parents do?

00:04:20

#15D: Father travelled outside on trade while mother did farm work.

Q: Did you live in the city in Ganzi itself or did you live outside?

#15D: We lived in proper Ganzi. It is the region where the Chinese first arrived. My mother passed away when I was 12 years old. When I was aged 12, Communist Chinese arrived in my region once. They spent a year and then went back. We escaped to the

mountains when they arrived. We fled to the mountains and it snowed. My mother died in the snow under a tree still carrying my young sibling on her back. Mother passed away in the snow during the time the Chinese first arrived. I was small then.

My father had not come back [from trade] in China when the Chinese first appeared in the region. There were mother and her siblings. Mother died on the mountain. Later the Chinese became gentler and told us, “Come back. You will be given back your respective homes.” They stayed only a year and did not proceed further [into the country]. All of them returned from our region. Then they did not come back.

Q: I’d like to come back to talk more about that in a little while, but first I’d like to know more about your childhood and what your life was like before you were 12 years old.

00:07:05

#15D: When I was 12, the younger siblings also expired and now there was no mother and father was away in China. Later father came back. At the age of 20, I left my village for Lhasa.

Q: Yes, that is right but we have some questions regarding your childhood, when you were younger than 12 years old.

#15D: Okay. My mother was dead and I lived with my grandmother and aunts. I was too young to maintain a home by myself. I was in a difficult situation.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: *Ama-la*, could you wait a little? [The interviewer] will ask questions about when you were younger.

Q: As a child, what kind of games did you play and who did you play with?

#15D: When [I] was small, there was only mud or things like that to play with. [We] would be sent to herd goats and used to roam in the forests. There were no duties at home and [I] just spent my time playing.

Q: What did you play with? What kind of games?

#15D: Yes?

Q: What kind of games did you play?

00:08:17

#15D: As children [we] made houses with stones or made fireplaces and human figurines using mud. That was how [we] played. [Laughs] One could not buy playthings like you do here because [we] lived in a village. So they were fashioned out of stones and mud.

Q: Did you enjoy being out with the goats in the countryside?

#15D: Yes?

Q: Did you enjoy herding the goats?

#15D: Yes. [Laughs]

Q: When you were out herding the goats and sheep, did you like it?

#15D: We did not have any shops.

Q: You used to herd the goats and sheep...

00:09:12

#15D: Yes, [I] tended goats and sheep. There were no shops. Shops were located at a great distance. Ours was a village.

Q: Did you enjoy tending goats and sheep?

#15D: Yes, there were goats, sheep, cows, *dzo* ‘animal bred from a yak and a cow’ and *dzomo* ‘female *dzo*.’ *Dzo* were used to plow the fields.

Q: What kind of trade was your father engaged in?

#15D: These days you have the *bakchen* ‘big brick’ and the *bakchung* ‘small brick’ teas. He used to bring those [from China], sell them here [in the village] and then go again. There were no other goods except tea. He was a tea trader. The *bakchen* is very tasty and there was the *bakchung*. There was also the *charil* ‘round tea.’ Mother did the fieldwork and later she passed away. [I] had two younger siblings.

Q: Was your father away for long periods of time?

#15D: Yes?

Q: Was he away for long periods of time?

#15D: [Not discernible]

Q: When your father went to trade, did it take a long time?

#15D: No. My mother used to be home.

Q: Your father used to travel to trade. Did those trade missions take a long time?

00:11:24

#15D: It did not, perhaps about 20 days but not more than a month. [He] would be back in 15-20 days as it was close by. [He] used to go to China, bring tea from there and sell them and then go back again. Our region was close to China. There were no vehicles then and horses were used. In those days, there were no vehicles.

Q: And did he ever when he came back...did he ever bring you any special gift?

#15D: Yes, he used to bring treats for the children from China. There were numerous types of eatables for purchase in China. You also find them here. Being a village, nothing much was available in our village.

Q: What did [father] bring for the children?

#15D: [He] brought things like sugar candy, brown sugar cubes and something called ...[not discernible], which is round in shape and packed in bamboo. [He] brought such things.

Q: What is the name of the thing that is packed in bamboo?

00:12:55

#15D: It was round-shaped brown sugar packed one on top of the other, two or three of them stacked together and packed in bamboo. They were very delicious. [He] also brought sugar candies. [Laughs]

The erstwhile Chinese that lived in China in those days had many things available, similar to what you find here. There were different types of fruits for sale, like apricots and grapes that were packaged.

Q: So you and your brothers and sisters must have been very excited when your father would come home.

#15D: Yes, when we heard that [he] was coming, we used to go to receive him at a place where there was a meadow. All the children went to receive [him].

I was 12 years old and had two younger brothers. They were afflicted by measles, a disease that children suffer from. One of them passed away in the morning and the other in the evening. I was not infected because I had suffered it earlier. There were no medical treatments available then and many children and adults died. It was only my older brother and I that survived.

Q: I wonder what year that might have been. *Ama-la*, were you 12 years old then?

#15D: Yes, I was 12 years old and the two younger siblings expired. I had an older brother who was in Kham when I left for Lhasa. [I] believe he is no more now.

Q: I'm sorry. How did your family react when your two brothers died on the same day? That's terrible.

00:16:37

#15D: Yes, and mother was no longer there. Mother had passed away and the children also died. Then Grandmother and aunts took care [of me].

Q: Was your mother alive when your brothers passed away?

#15D: She was not. Mother had passed away in the snow when the Communist Chinese appeared. So my younger siblings and I were left alone. Since his childhood, my older brother had been in the care of my father's sister. He was not living with us.

Q: And this is when your father was travelling.

#15D: That is right. Father was in China and mother was dead when he returned. However, [he] was back when the two boys passed away. Father expired when I was 16 years old.

Q: And your grandmother, did she use to tell you stories?

00:18:21

#15D: Yes, she did. [Laughs] Grandmother told stories. She lived to a ripe age; grandmother was 95 when she passed away.

Q: Did grandmother tell you stories?

#15D: Grandmother loved sugar candy and anything sweet. So whenever I went out grandmother would ask, "Have you brought me [candies]?" Although she was old, she was amazingly healthy and brisk.

Q: What kind of stories did she tell you that you remember?

#15D: [I] cannot remember the stories. [Laughs] Now that I am so old, [I] have forgotten them. [I] cannot recall much due to old age. Earlier I could narrate everything and my children used to say, "Ama, you have a clear memory." But now I forget everything. I tell them that I forget whatever is told to me even right now. It was different earlier. As you grow older, the memory becomes shorter.

Q: Did she ever sing songs to you?

00:20:05

#15D: Yes, [she] used to sing. [Laughs] She was too old to know many songs, but grandmother loved stories. [She] was advanced in age, so there was not much singing and stuff.

Q: What were your meals like? What kind of food did you eat at that time in your house?

#15D: It was mainly *pa* 'dough made from roasted barley flour and tea.' [We] ate *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' and at times our aunt cooked *logomomo* 'steamed bread.' That and *tsampa* were what we ate and sometimes *momo* 'steamed dumplings.' Meat was mostly eaten boiled. So it was *pa* and boiled meat. [Laughs] There was never any frying of meat or vegetables, except boiling. Unlike here, yak meat was available. Mutton and yak

meat were mainly consumed. Yak meat was boiled and served along with *tsampa* and butter. [Laughs]

Q: Did you have a ..., was there a special treat besides the candy that your father brought that you liked to eat on special occasions?

#15D: There was nothing much except for preparing *momo* on festive days. During *Losar* ‘Tibetan New Year,’ just like we do here, [we] used to make *khapsey* ‘fried dough,’ which was also kept as offering [on the altar]. If we went to attend any shows during festive days, we made *khapsey* and took them with us. Yes, it was like that.

Q: Would you say that your household would be considered wealthy household or average household or poor household in comparison to other families around you?

00:23:43

#15D: In terms of wealth?

Q: Yes, what was it considered like?

#15D: We were not very rich and had just enough to survive. [Here] you have people who deposit money in the bank. There was not anything like that. You consumed what you earned and then there was your farm, from where everything that you needed came. In case you needed to buy meat or some such thing, you bartered your grains for it after the harvest. Besides that, there was not anything much. And as for your house, you owned it and did not have to pay rent. You also owned animals.

Q: What was your...Did you have any relationship to the local monastery?

#15D: Do you mean neighbors?

Q: Monastery...

#15D: No, [we] did not sell milk.

Q: *Ama-la*, nearby your village was a monastery where the monks lived.

#15D: I see. You mean a monastery. Yes, there was a large monastery. During festivals, one could watch the *cham* ‘religious dance performance by monks.’ The monastery was very large. The Dango Gonpa was very large.

Q: Dango Gonpa?

#15D: Yes, and there was also the Ganzi Gonpa.

Q: Were there two monasteries?

00:25:32

#15D: There were monasteries where we could go to view the temples. There were many monasteries.

Q: Were you excited to see the *cham* performances when you went?

#15D: During a *cham*, different kinds of masks are worn and [we] would be told not to look at them. When we were little children, there was [a performer with] a nice mask resembling a fairy. We would be warned, “Do not look at that. It will entice you to hell.” There were masks resembling tiger and leopard heads and the children were told that these would not lead us to the depth of hell. [We] were advised to watch them but not the one that resembled a fairy because it would entice us. The mask resembled the face of a fairy and was fair. [We] were told that it would entice us to hell. When it arrived during a show, as children we covered our faces [puts hands in front of face and laughs] believing it was true. Being children, [we] thought they would really take us away. [Laughs]

Q: Did you sometimes by mistake see the [laughs]...Did you peek through your hand?

#15D: [Laughs]

Q: Did you go to school as a child? Did you go to the monastery for schooling? What kind of schooling did you have?

00:28:01

#15D: [I] did not attend school. [I have] never been to school. There were no schools in our region. Except for boys, it was beyond the reach of girls. Girls took care of the fields and animals and never went to school.

Q: Have you been to monasteries to receive an education?

#15D: No.

Q: *Ama-la*, have you ever attended any school?

#15D: Never. [I have] never been to study.

Q: So you said your father died when you were 16 years old. What did he die of?

#15D: Father retained water in his body and died all of a sudden. Initially he was ill for some time, but there was no pain at all. His feet and face became swollen. There were no doctors then and [he] took Tibetan medicines. Chinese hospitals were located far away and [father] was unable to go there. Both my parents died when I was young—mother at 12 and father when [I] was 16 years old. Then there were just me and my older brother but he was given in adoption to my paternal aunt. I lived with my maternal aunt and grandmother. [Wipes eyes]

Q: What did your mother die of when she died?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: She died in the snow.

Q: I know it is painful for you to remember this. Your father died and then you went to live with... Your grandmother took care of you. You were 16 at that time.

00:31:13

#15D: Yes, I lived with my grandmother.

Q: How long did you live with your grandmother?

#15D: [I] lived with grandmother until around the age of 20. By then [I] was given a lot of responsibilities like working in the fields and taking care of the cows, so [I] ran away to Lhasa. [I] arrived in Lhasa at the age of 20, having walked the whole way through. There were no vehicles, no money, not even an animal to ride. [I] begged from the villagers along the way, receiving enough food to last for two to three days. There was no provision for preparing tea, so food was just *pa* made by adding *tsampa* to water in a cup. The journey on foot to Lhasa took two months. Then [I] arrived in Lhasa.

Q: What was the reason you went to Lhasa?

00:32:59

#15D: The reason to went to Lhasa was for pilgrimage. [I] did the rounds of pilgrim sites in Lhasa and then went to Shigatse where I did the same. After spending a few months [in Shigatse], [I] returned to Lhasa. Once in Lhasa [I] could not return to the village and around the age of 23, I met the father of my children. Then [I] stayed back in Lhasa and could not return [home]. [I] never met my aunt again. I had grown up and aunts and the others turned older. We could not write to each other.

Q: Just to go back to your walk to Lhasa, from Ganzi to Lhasa, how long did that take?

#15D: The journey took two and half months, walking the whole way through. We set up camp near bigger villages to beg at the doors. Having no money, [I] was forced to beg. Begging for the first time was very embarrassing and when the person emerged with *tsampa*, [I would] run away.

There were some elders who said, "Poor things. These people are on pilgrimage. They are embarrassed. Come back. It does not matter. You are on pilgrimage, so take the *tsampa*." Then [I would] go back to collect it. I was young then and people sympathized and I received a good quantity of *tsampa*. [Laughs]

Q: Were you doing prostrations along the way?

00:35:56

#15D: [I] did not prostrate along the way but in Lhasa. It was not possible to prostrate on the route, as one must climb up and down mountain passes, walk across snow and ford huge rivers. While fording rivers, I was too small to walk across. Holding on to adults on

both sides, [I] was dragged across in the water to the other bank. Being barefoot in the extreme cold, stones stuck to the feet on reaching the bank. It was very cold. Then one urinated on the foot and the stones got unstuck. If you pulled [at the stones], the skin came off too. Warm urine thawed the ice and [the stones got unstuck]. That was how [I] struggled along the journey from Kham when I was small. [I] suffered a lot during the journey.

Q: Who were you traveling with on this pilgrimage?

#15D: There were two other girls and monks who were going to join monasteries in Lhasa. Both the girls were older than me and there were the monks. Joining the monk group [I] ran away without the knowledge of my family. I fled without the knowledge of my grandmother and aunt.

Q: Was there ever a problem with thieves or bandits on the way?

#15D: [We] did not meet any thieves and bandits. There were no thieves and bandits. We did not possess anything of value to be robbed nor did we meet any thieves and bandits. People mentioned their presence but [we] did not see them anywhere.

Q: When you got to Lhasa, how did you find housing?

00:39:27

#15D: There were guesthouses in Lhasa where we stayed. For two days we saw the holy sites and then set off for pilgrimage to Shigatse. There were places where pilgrims could stay. As for food, one could go begging for *tsampa*.

Q: How did you meet your husband?

#15D: Yes?

Q: How did you meet the father of your children?

#15D: He is here now.

Q: How did you meet him there?

#15D: No.

Q: How did you meet in Lhasa?

#15D: He is not the present one. He was a Drapchi Magmi, a soldier of the Tibetan Government in Lhasa. It was not love but being a soldier, he sort of forcefully caught and kept me with him. [Laughs] It was not love. Then you became parents of two or three children and lived together.

One fears the soldiers and once you were caught, there was no escape. [Laughs] There was no way for escape and you accepted it. Then when you became pregnant, there was nowhere to flee.

Q: How many children did you have?

00:41:58

#15D: Altogether I had seven children. Four of them survive while three passed away.

Q: During this time, how long did you spent in Lhasa?

#15D: [I] spent several years in Lhasa. The first child was born in Lhasa and the rest of the children in India. [We] left Lhasa before the invasion. The Chinese had already arrived. A year after the arrival of the Chinese [we] came to India. Tibet was lost several years after we had arrived in India. [We] left [Tibet] before the invasion.

Q: You are in Lhasa and when did you first hear about the Chinese or people start talking about the Chinese?

#15D: The Chinese were present in Lhasa then but they did not do anything [harmful]. The Chinese stayed calmly then. We lived at the military camp because he [husband] was a soldier. We fled from the military base. A year after we arrived, Tibet was lost.

Q: Arrived where? India?

#15D: Yes.

Q: I don't understand the timeline here a little bit. So when you got to Lhasa, were the Chinese already there or was it before?

00:44:42

#15D: Yes, [they] were already there then. The Chinese were there.

Q: Had they already arrived there?

#15D: Not before [us]. When we left Kham, the Chinese were trailing us and when we arrived in Lhasa, so did [they]. The Drapchi soldiers were in Chamdo then and after losing the territory of Chamdo, they returned to Lhasa. [We] lived in Lhasa for a year after the arrival of Chinese and then left for India.

Q: So one year in Lhasa after the Chinese had come and did you have any encounters with the Chinese personally?

#15D: Yes, [I have] met them.

Q: Were there any encounters?

#15D: There were none. We did not face anything. The Chinese had arrived and lived there but it was calm. We just left after the arrival of the Chinese though there were no fighting going on then.

Q: Did you personally meet any Chinese soldiers or officials or anyone?

00:46:26

#15D: I did meet officials. I knew a little Chinese from living there. They treated [me] well when [I] spoke their language. When purchasing goods from their shops, they gave a good deal. Now [I have] forgotten the language. At that time [I] knew a little of their language from the erstwhile Chinese. [I] understood a little of Chinese language.

Q: How did they treat you?

#15D: When [I] spoke a few lines in Chinese, they seemed to like it.

Q: Did you feel that they would cause problems in Lhasa or did you feel that it was okay that they were there? How did you feel?

#15D: I did not feel anything. [I] would not know then what they were going to do. Besides His Holiness the Dalai Lama was living there then. He was living there when we left. Also they were not doing anything but living calmly. It was similar to how we live here, calmly. There was not any trouble at all.

Q: How did you come to learn Chinese language?

00:48:42

#15D: There was the Chinese [of the previous regime] living in our village.

Q: Were the Chinese there?

#15D: Yes, the erstwhile Chinese. We paid our taxes to the former Chinese. They were the Chinese of yore, not the Communists. The authority to whom we paid taxes belonged to the previous Chinese [regime]. You find Chinese of the previous [regime] in Kolkata [India]. They are the same.

Q: Oh, you paid taxes to the Chinese?

#15D: Yes?

Q: Did your village pay their taxes to the Chinese?

00:49:40

#15D: It was paid to the Chinese. My family did not pay taxes, as our land was not taxable. However, those who owned lands...like people in Lhasa pay taxes to the Tibetan Government, similarly we were obliged to pay to the Chinese.

Q: I was just wondering why you did not pay taxes to Tibetan officials rather than to the Chinese?

#15D: There was no relation with the Tibetan Government then. The territories lying to one side [western side] of a huge river called Kamdhodu paid their taxes to the Tibetan Government and territories on the other side paid like us. They were not obliged to pay to the Tibetan Government. The territories were different.

Q: Okay. So going back to Lhasa, you were there a year and you said that you'd heard of an attack. What attack are you talking about? A Chinese attack.

#15D: No, there was no attack [in Lhasa] then. They [the Chinese] opened some shops and lived calmly. There was no [trouble] when we left Tibet. It was only after a year or two after arriving in India did one hear about the riots in Lhasa. Then the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] was formed and Lhasa was lost. We lived in India at that time.

Q: Why did you decide to leave Lhasa after a year if there was no...everything was peaceful and His Holiness was still there? What were you thinking that you should leave Lhasa?

00:52:58

#15D: Well, just like that. One listened to other peoples' talk and came away. Initially there was no plan to stay back but visit the famous Kolkata and return. However, [we] stayed for a year and then another year and so on. It has been many years in India and [I have] spent the entire life in India.

Q: So you're saying it was the lure of Kolkata?

#15D: That is right. [We] were young and people mentioned how nice it was in India and praised Kolkata. Making plans with the other companions, [we] left together [but] did not reach Kolkata. [We] did not reach Kolkata. [Laughs]

Q: Where did you get sidetracked?

#15D: We stayed in Gangtok [Sikkim], and quite a long time in Kalimpong [West Bengal], which is a nice and large place. [We] stayed in Gangtok and worked hard.

Q: Just to go back before you left Lhasa, what was your relationship at that point to Buddhist practice?

00:55:32

#15D: Dharma?

Q: Yes.

#15D: Except for making offerings, [I] would not know the dharma when [I] cannot read the scriptures.

Q: How do you practice the dharma?

#15D: [No answer]

Q: What was your understanding of the...Even though you cannot read the scriptures but from what you were told and visiting the monastery, what was your understanding about Buddhism?

#15D: [I] make offerings of money to the monastery to [read] the *zungdhue* ‘collection of Buddhist religious works’ and *gyethong* ‘summary of the Prajnaparamita in 8,000 verses’ and the monastery does the task. [We] did not invite [monks] home [to read the scriptures] but made offerings [at the monastery]. I follow the same here too. I make offerings to the monastery, as due to my ill health I cannot invite monks home. Earlier I could hardly walk but after treatment, it is better. I have a niece who helps me, but nobody else.

Q: Why was His Holiness important to you?

00:57:46

#15D: I cannot say much about that. It is His Holiness the Dalai Lama that the whole world, whoever he may be, prays to. Except for that, due to old age I do not have much to say.

Q: *Ama-la*, once again to go back to your time in Lhasa, you were living with your husband. Were you living in the army camp or were you living separate or where were you living?

#15D: [We] lived in the army camp. He [husband] had his mother and siblings living in Lhasa, but I lived with my husband in the army camp. There was no work and [we] survived on the salary from the army. [I] spent time knitting socks and sweaters.

Q: What was he doing during that time because I don't believe there was any fighting going on then?

#15D: [He] was in the Security Army, a security guard for His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Every month the security guard duty rotated among the Security Army personnel. His Holiness was living in the palace and the security guards were posted there. The Security Army troops took turns. They did not have battle duties. Everything in the Tibetan Government was calm then.

Q: You were living...Other soldiers wives were living in the camp as well. Is that correct?

01:01:01

#15D: They were. There were different camps of the unit. [A unit of] the Kusung Magmi ‘Security Army’ was located here and another located there. There were many units. The soldiers took turns to serve security duty.

Q: Did you make friends with the other wives?

#15D: There was no work for all the soldiers' wives. They worked from home knitting sweaters while others wove woolen cloth and *pangden* 'multi-colored apron worn by married women.' There were some highly skilled women who stitched boots. I was among those that did not have much talent and knitted socks and sweaters.

Q: During the time when you were living in the camp there, is that when you had your child?

#15D: [Nods]

Q: You said that you had a child in Lhasa. Was the child born when you were at the army camp?

#15D: Yes, one child. The first child was born at the army camp. The child died around two months after birth due to harmful causes. It was a male child and [he] passed away. [He] lived for around two months and then suffered a sudden pain during the night and expired.

Q: *Ama-la*, can you tell us something about what were the conditions for women giving childbirth at that time in that place? Was there a hospital they went to or was it in their home or...how did it take place?

01:04:16

#15D: There were no hospitals. You gave birth at home. You gave birth to your child at home and then did everything yourself. There were no hospitals. In Tibet you did not go to hospitals but gave childbirth at home. I gave birth to seven children. I delivered all the births at home, cut the umbilical cords and did the washing myself, as there was no one else to do it. Were there neighbors, they might extend some help but otherwise, there were no hospitals or such things.

Here, [women] visit hospitals for a lot of check-ups but in my time until the child emerged, there was nothing done. If someone cannot give birth, surgery is performed and the child is removed from the belly. Such things are done here, but I never experienced anything like that. I gave birth myself and did everything myself. That was it. [I] had hot water made and placed it beside me. Soon after cutting the umbilical cord, kneeling [I] bathed the child in it and immediately wrapped it in a cloth. I would be given some warm noodle soup to drink. [Laughs] Even though nothing [elaborate] was done, nothing [adverse] happened to me.

Here [women] go frequently to hospitals and yet they face difficulty giving birth. Times have turned upside down. There was nothing like that during my time. Some gave birth in the forests in the mountain and a field worker, after suffering labor pain gave birth on the way home. There were cases like that. Shortly after birth, [it] was wrapped in [the mother's] skirt and carried home. Such was the case and there were no hospitals. You did everything yourself.

Q: It was a different time.

01:07:23

#15D: Yes, times are different. These days there are so many illnesses and such a lot has to be done for children. We used to tear up clothes and use as diapers for the babies but now-a-days there are diapers and powders and oils that are applied. Such a lot has to be done for the babies, whereas it was easy to bring up children then. You could tear up your old shirt and use it as a diaper and throw it away after use. However, one has to buy expensive diapers here. I would get tired.

Q: [Laughs]

#15D: I say, “Your children are expensive while mine were born at low cost. When your children grow up and if they do not help [you], it is a lot of trouble. You spend so much on them.”

Q: *Ama-la*, what do you think has enabled you to preserve your good spirit? You have suffered many losses. How have you been able to endure that and still live a positive life?

#15D: These days I lead a happy life, as my children take care of me. I have someone who serves me and face no difficulties. I struggled as a child and during old age, [I] am living well. There are people who lead a happy childhood but suffer during old age.

Q: I'd like to go back one moment here just when...after you left Lhasa with your husband and you said you didn't get to Kolkata but to Gangtok...or Kalimpong. Can you tell us a little bit what happened there when you got there?

01:11:01

#15D: [We] lived in Gangtok.

Q: What did you do there?

#15D: [I] sold *chang* ‘home-brewed beer.’ One must make a living, so [I] brewed *chang* and sold it. My husband worked as a cook in a restaurant and I sold *chang*. That is how we survived. [Laughs] Selling *chang* is a sin but one was forced to do it, as one needs to eat.

Q: Was your husband happy to have come to Gangtok?

#15D: Yes?

Q: Did you like it in Gangtok? Were you happy?

#15D: In Gangtok?

Q: Were you happy to have come to Gangtok?

#15D: Yes, as we did not suffer any illnesses. Both of us were young and in a position to work hard.

Q: Did you miss Lhasa at all?

#15D: Yes?

Q: While you lived in Gangtok, didn't you miss Lhasa?

01:12:40

#15D: No. It was very good in Gangtok then. Provisions were really cheap and plentiful. What do you get here these days for a rupee? We could purchase 16 breads for a rupee, bread costing just an anna '1/16th of a rupee' each. Everything was very cheap. If you ate in a restaurant, you could get half a bowl of *thukpa* 'noodle soup' for 8 annas. A rupee fetched you a full bowl of *thukpa*. A kilogram of mutton cost just a rupee and 4 annas. It was cheap. If one worked hard, food was plentiful and cheap.

Q: How did you first hear about the escape of the Dalai Lama? How did you first hear of that?

#15D: Government hospital? Where? In India?

Q: No, *ama-la*. You were living in India since a long while, His Holiness arrived later. His Holiness arrived later in India. How did you hear of that?

#15D: We were living in Gangtok then and when His Holiness arrived, we left Gangtok and came here. We had come on pilgrimage with the intention to return, but His Holiness stayed here and so we too did the same.

Q: Did you hear of His Holiness' arrival in India while you were living in Gangtok?

01:14:47

#15D: That is right; Tibet was lost when we were living in Gangtok. His Holiness left after the invasion. He left for Bodh Gaya [Bihar]. We decided to go to Bodh Gaya on pilgrimage. Then His Holiness arrived here [Dharamsala]. The palace was not located there [points to the left] but was situated higher up. We arrived here at that time and since then have lived here, working as coolies for survival. We worked as coolies otherwise there would be nothing to eat.

Q: Were you surprised that the Chinese became aggressive?

#15D: At that time we were living in Gangtok.

Q: How did you feel because initially you did not think that the Chinese would [be aggressive] but later you heard that they had attacked Lhasa?

#15D: They attacked and the *Chushi Gangdrug* arrived in Gangtok after losing the battle. The *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas arrived with the news that Tibet was lost.

Q: In Gangtok?

#15D: The *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas initially arrived in Gangtok. Poor things, they were also sent to work as coolies. Much later they were dispatched to join the Indian Army. They are still there in the Indian Army, those that belonged to the *Chushi Gangdrug*. Later some of them gradually left the army.

Q: Did you hear about it from the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#15D: Yes.

Q: Did you hear about the attack in Lhasa from the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas?

01:17:20

#15D: The *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas arrived and then the soldiers of the Tibetan army; the soldiers of the Tibetan Government army.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I'm trying to get to her feelings about the Chinese.

Q: But how did you feel about the Chinese? Were you surprised that they had been... You described earlier that there were no problems in Lhasa when you were there, but then they became aggressive and war started. Did that surprise you?

#15D: [Laughs] There is nothing that can be done to the Chinese. Except for praying, [we] were helpless. Hardly able to survive, there was nothing one could do to the Chinese.

Q: What did you feel about the Chinese?

#15D: What should [I] say about the Chinese? What can [I] do? [Laughs] Except for cursing them there is nothing we can do.

Q: Okay. I think we can end here. So, *ama-la*, I want to thank you for sharing your story with us.

#15D: Okay. [Smiles]

Q: I want to ask you just a few more questions. If this interview was shown in—I asked you this before but I ask you again—if this interview was shown in Tibet or China or anywhere else, would this be a problem for you?

#15D: No.

Q: Can we use your real name for this project or do you want us to use an alias?

#15D: You can, it is Dolma Choezom.

Q: Thank you once again.

END OF INTERVIEW