

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #16C – Tsering Choephel
May 10, 2014

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #16C
2. Interviewee: Tsering Choephel
3. Age: 65
4. Date of Birth: 1948
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Shingri, Dhingri
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1960
9. Date of Interview: May 10, 2014
10. Place of Interview: Northwest Tibetan Cultural Association Community Center,
Portland, Oregon, USA
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 45 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen (of Portland)
14. Videographer: Tony Sondag
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen (of Bylakuppe)

Biographical Information:

Tsering Choephel was born in a town called Shingri in Dhingri, close to Mt. Everest. He is fourth among 10 sons in a farming family that cultivated lands and raised animals like sheep and yaks. He recalls that as a child he helped graze the animals. He shares his personal experience of growing up in a large family and feels the mother is more important than a father to a child.

Tsering Choephel had seen a few Chinese soldiers in his village and remembers that they searched houses and passed out books written in Chinese. His parents secretly prepared for escape but did not want to tell the children anything about their plans. He only understood that the Chinese were taking their country from them and one night the entire family left their home. He shares his experience of the escape journey crossing over the pass near Mt. Everest and arrival in Solukhumbu in Nepal.

Tsering Choephel recounts life as a student in India where he lived under the guidance of foster parents until 10th Grade. He applied for a special program in the United States to work as a lumberjack in Maine. He describes the working conditions in the forest. Later he moved to Washington and as the local community of Tibetans grew, Tsering Choephel helped to establish the Tibetan Community Center in Portland, Oregon.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, childhood memories, herding, escape experiences, life as a refugee in Nepal, life as a refugee in India, life as a refugee in the United States.

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Interview #16C

Interviewee: Tsering Choephel

Age: 65, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: May 10, 2014

[Interviewee speaks in English for the majority of the interview.]

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:09

Interviewee #16C: My name is Tsering Choephel.

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?

#16C: Absolutely.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us. During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know.

#16C: Okay.

Q: If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

#16C: Okay.

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

#16C: No.

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

#16C: Thank you very much.

Q: Tsering-*la*. May I call you that?

#16C: [Laughs] No, Tsering is fine.

Q: Oh, Tsering-*la* is better. Tsering-*la*, please tell us where you were born and what year?

00:01:22

#16C: I was born in Tibet and the...I do not remember exactly what month, date but my parents tell me that I was born in 1948.

Q: 1948?

#16C: Yeah. So [the] way the Westerners versus the Tibetans do is a little bit different. If you are born here in the United States for example, the day you're born on you count your ages, but in our country if you are born in the middle of the month but you are one year older. So if I am...let's say if I'm 61 years today but in our count, in our Tibetan counting it will be 62.

Q: It'll be 62, if you are born in the middle of the month?

#16C: Whenever. So it goes by the nuclear calendar.

Q: By the nuclear calendar.

#16C: Yes.

Q: So that makes you 62...

#16C: If it's 62. Right now I'm 65, but I'll be 66.

Q: I see. 65. Thank you. But you will be 66.

#16C: That's an example of it.

Q: That's a good example.

#16C: Okay.

Q: What is the...Where in Tibet was your family home?

00:02:43

#16C: In...called Dhingri, Tibet and my own town was called Shingri.

Q: Shingri. What province of Tibet was that?

#16C: I'm not sure.

Q: Like Kham...?

#16C: No, no, it's...

Q: Utsang?

#16C: Utsang, yes.

Q: That's right, so in Utsang. How many people were in your family when you were a little boy?

#16C: Wow.

Q: Do you remember?

#16C: Are you including your siblings and your...?

Q: Just siblings. Just siblings and your...

#16C: Well, my mother had 10 boys.

Q: Ten?

#16C: Ten boys and then I had, you know my...of course, my parents. And then my father's side they have couple of brothers. So that gives 12, 13, then you got aunts and uncles and so many. So, I mean if you keep counting, there's many but I don't have any numbers on the top of my head right now.

Q: I understand that. So what kind of work did your family do when you were a...?

00:03:53

#16C: They're mixed. They are half nomads and half, what do you call this?

[Someone off camera: Is it *shingpa* 'farmers'? *Shingpa*?

#16C: *Shingpa*, yes.

Q: Farmers?

#16C: Farmers, yes.

Q: Half nomads and half farmers.

#16C: Yes.

Q: Do you have any memories of Tibet?

#16C: Oh, yeah a little bit.

Q: What are they? Tell us about them.

#16C: Well, when I was young my parents put me to go after the yaks, after the sheep, and they... even I think I've plowed some fields, you know.

Cultivating fields. Worked in the fields, you know even though I was like, I don't really exactly remember but I think almost...somewhere around 9 years old.

Q: Like how many yaks, roughly would you have to take care of?

00:04:48

#16C: Well, I don't have to take care of but I need to go look after them saying that—are they on the right spot? You know, yaks go separately all over the fields, so we try to stay within, you know together kind of thing. If I remember correctly about 15 of them as far as yaks go. And then we have sheep, many sheep, probably about 1,200 sheep and they have a guy who runs the...you know, after the...guy who is looking after the sheep, particular guy that go there [to] help them out. So see same kind of, same kind of thing...

Q: Because you were a boy...

#16C: I'm a boy, yeah.

Q: ...you were just a boy. What are the memories of how the land looked when you were a boy? Can you tell us?

#16C: The land has pretty, pretty plants, lot of hills around. There's not much trees, you know and [speaks in Tibetan] what do you call *pang*?

[Interpreter]: Meadows.

#16C: Meadows, yeah, meadows. I guess, *pang*. I see those things and lots of high mountains, you know around it. And then also there's...at the meadows there's a lot of good grass for hay for the, for the animals.

Q: Yes, very fertile.

#16C: Yeah, very fertile. Correct.

Q: Very fertile there. This is in Utsang.

#16C: Utsang, yeah. We're very close to Mt. Everest.

Q: Really?

00:06:26

#16C: Yes, and if my memory is correct I think if we walk from my place to Mt. Everest base probably it took about two days. I think somewhere there. Then you see the base of Mt. Everest from the Tibet side.

Q: Do you remember seeing Mt. Everest?

#16C: Oh, yeah. We crossed Mt. Everest.

Q: You crossed it or you went to the...

#16C: Crossed it.

Q: You went over Mount...?

#16C: Over Mount..., yes.

Q: You climbed over Mt. Everest?

#16C: No, not [all] the way up there. Not the 29,000; no. Where there's the base, you can cross when we escaped from Tibet.

Q: Where there was a pass...

#16C: Yes, a pass. Correct.

Q: ...that you were able to escape.

#16C: Correct.

Q: What is your memory of what Mt. Everest looked like when you were there? Could you see it? Did the sky clear frequently?

00:07:17

#16C: It was snowing that day. Well, I can...how we came through is...

Q: No, I meant when you were a little boy. Could you see Mt. Everest from where you live?

#16C: Oh, yeah. Yes. Oh, where I live? That I don't remember.

Q: You don't remember that?

#16C: No, I don't.

Q: We'll talk about the other part later. So what kind of house or home did you live in as a little boy?

#16C: The house is built by, basically mixed with rocks and maybe cement. We really don't have cement but it's basically mud. Mud and rocks kind of put together, build it. It's one level. Probably I don't remember, maybe say six, seven rooms in the house, you know.

Then [we] have a huge, huge building to place the sheep and yaks in separate kind of barn. It's not really a barn but, you know, every time in the afternoon they collect all and put in the barn. Daytime you have to go out to the field to, you know, let them release.

Q: Let them release. Did it have a roof or was it like just wall?

#16C: No, just wall.

Q: Like a stockade.

#16C: That's correct, yes.

Q: I see. Interesting. How many children were in your family?

00:08:49

#16C: Me? Myself?

Q: Yeah.

#16C: I have three of my own.

Q: No, no, I'm sorry. I meant your mother and father had you and...were there other children?

#16C: Yes, like I told you 10 boys.

Q: You meant the 10 boys were in your family, your siblings.

#16C: I'm siblings. I'm...

Q: So you had nine...

#16C: ...brothers.

Q: Brothers.

#16C: Correct.

Q: No girls.

#16C: No girls.

Q: What was that like for a family to have all boys...?

#16C: I think it's really a challenge for my mother obviously, you know, and my dad, but our family's so big and we have couple of different places. You know, you go...We have a main house, then we go out there called the...place to go to look after the sheep and yaks, one place. Then we get one house in town. So we kind of...we are kind of a little bit

separate and so we really don't know. We don't get together too much if I remember correctly.

Q: Where were you in that line up of 10 boys?

#16C: I am the...well...see...the first one; the oldest one's passed away. I'm the...by birth I'm the fourth.

Q: Fourth one down?

#16C: From the top but since...I've never seen the oldest one. Then I have two brothers both older than me. They both passed away. Now I'm the oldest one basically and I have two brothers [who] live in Japan. One monk in Japan, both of them running right now...called Potala Palace. They have a center over there.

Q: Really? He is a monk?

00:10:34

#16C: He is a monk. He's a *geshe* 'Buddhist monk with philosophy degree.'

Q: That is very unusual. I haven't heard of many Tibetans settling in Japan.

#16C: That's correct.

Q: Is that correct?

#16C: That's correct.

Q: How did that happen that he wound up in Japan?

#16C: It's kind of a long story. He was in...first he was, my brother was, both were in...no, younger brother was in Mussoorie [India] in school with me way back in the '60s. Then he became a monk and then after the monk...he then went to school in Dharamsala [India] in dialectic and he got a degree. And then I think—if I'm correct—His Holiness [the Dalai Lama's] office sent him to Japan, over there to I think translating some scriptures, Tibetan scriptures. And then they lived in Japan for many years and then they worked in the Office of Tibet for couple of years. Then I think their kind of...their term is over. Then they start opening their own sort of...center.

Q: Center in Japan?

#16C: In Japan.

Q: Which city?

#16C: Right in Tokyo.

Q: Tokyo? Interesting. Well, so much to hear today, we better get back to you. So you're in... Your growing up and that your two older brothers were, I guess, in your life but also out doing farm work and herding, and you're the third one down. Do you go to school at all?

00:12:16

#16C: In Tibet, no.

Q: No school?

#16C: No.

Q: So you're mostly out helping the family run the farm and the animals?

#16C: That's correct.

Q: What was your mother like?

#16C: She's very small, skinny; skinny as Yangchen [points to someone off camera], maybe skinnier.

Q: Skinny, petite woman?

#16C: Yeah, very pretty, very kind.

Q: Very kind.

#16C: Yeah.

Q: Was she...was it happiness or a joy to have that many sons?

#16C: That I don't know. You know, I mean obviously she had many challenges in taking care of that I myself feel that...I love my both parents but I think mothers are more important in your life. I don't care how your fathers are kind and loving, whatever it is mothers are very important in your life. I have argument with my father and I told her...I told him that mothers are more kind and you came from your mother, I came from my mother.

"I love you dad but I love my mother more." And he was kind of you know, why and all that. I kind of explained to him, you know first of all you have...the mother has to carry in her tummy for nine months. After giving birth she has to take the pain. After taking pain, then you have to take care of the baby and you, as a dad probably never did take care of me, you know. Who changed the diaper? Who put anything like that? It's kind of culture is a little bit different. Here in the United States I see the...both...

Q: ...parents...

#16C: ...*pa-la* ‘respectful term for father’ and *ama* ‘mother’ parents taking care of...taking turns and changing diapers and all that. In our country basically most of them, mother’s the one who does it. Then mother has to carry...I’ve seen her carry the...one of them on her back, one here [indicates left hand] but still has to do the housework; cooking and you know all that stuff. I really appreciate it and what my mother went through and then I feel the same way to the other mothers. What they go through. I’m kind of sympathetic about it. So, I mean don’t misunderstand I love my *pa-la*, father, but I kind of [feel] that way.

Q: Yes.

00:14:44

#16C: My mother, she went through many difficulties.

Q: Were you ever around when she was giving birth because you were the third one down and...?

#16C: I’ve never seen it.

Q: You never saw that.

#16C: Never seen it.

Q: Did she give birth at home?

#16C: Yes, that’s all we had.

Q: That’s all you had?

#16C: That’s all we had.

Q: Were there midwives or...?

#16C: There is some...not really midwives; they are helpful.

Q: Just helpers?

#16C: If I remember correctly I think my father has four sisters. So they are very helpful to my mother and then there is a, you know, helper to taking care of, you know fields and taking care of your animals and they kind of help and I do remember that my mum is in the bed after the birth, after the birth for many days.

Q: In bed for many days after giving birth.

#16C: Yes.

Q: Was there in Tibetan culture, is there more value placed on having a male child than a female child or is it...?

00:15:53

#16C: Well, I think there are, half and half kind of mixed. It's kind of unique that my mum had 10 boys. So I really do not know. If I personally...I didn't have girls. Girls [are a] little bit more easy to deal with, you know, if you raise correctly and the much...handling is easier and I think they have a better...I don't know...feel they are more precise, you know. They are more caring. That's my perception.

Q: Like mothers.

#16C: [Laughs] Like mothers, yes.

Q: So there you were growing up in this beautiful land not far from Mt. Everest and you grazed because it was a very fertile valley. So does anything begin to change in your life? We're talking about now you're what...4, 5, 6, 7? When does your life begin to change, at what age from outside forces, if anything?

#16C: I don't know. I talked to Yangchen [pre-interviewer]. Yangchen asked me a few questions yesterday to fill the form and I told her about when I was left from Tibet [I] was maybe 8, 9. I think I'm little bit older than that. Maybe 10, 12 years old and it was a big change when I...

Q: What happened?

#16C: You know, we came, escaped from Tibet...

Q: But why did you have to escape?

00:17:23

#16C: Because Chinese invaded our country.

Q: Did you see...but I want to know what happened to your family that made them decide to move? What was going on?

#16C: Well, in our country where I live I've never seen any bombings or anything. I see some Chinese.

Q: You never saw any bombings?

#16C: No, no bomb, no guns.

Q: No soldiers?

#16C: I see soldiers.

Q: Oh, you did?

#16C: Oh, yeah.

Q: When did you first see them?

#16C: Boy! That I don't remember exactly.

Q: You were a little boy?

#16C: Yeah, pretty little, boy yeah.

Q: What were they doing?

#16C: They were just checking everybody here and there, you know going house to house.

Q: Really! What were they checking for?

#16C: That I don't know. I don't know.

Q: Do you remember what the feeling was to have them show up?

#16C: Well, to be honest with you at that time I'm small, young, I have not much feeling.

Q: Yeah.

00:18:22

#16C: And only my parents tell me saying, "These are the people that are going to take our country." And I don't understand what's the meaning and I remember there is a calendar. The calendar was His Holiness is on one side, Mao Zedong is on one side and Panchen Rinpoche was on one side. I remember that.

Q: The middle one was what?

#16C: I think Mao Zedong.

Q: You did say Mao Zedong. So it was a calendar with His Holiness...

#16C: ...and Mao Zedong...

Q: ...and Mao Zedong on the same picture and then...

#16C: ...and next to is Panchen Lama.

Q: ...and Panchen Lama.

#16C: Yeah. I see that the parents point out saying, “This is His Holiness, our leader. He’s the reincarnation of Chenrezig ‘Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, the patron saint of Tibet’” and all that. And Panchen Lama I remember. “This is the bad guy” and I’m asking why the bad guy is with...

Q: ...with the good guys.

#16C: ...good guys, you know. Then I really don’t remember what they explained to me. I don’t remember and then I remember that the Chinese people gave us a whole bunch of books. I remember there were three or four books and I’m trying to read that in my bed at that time.

Q: Were they in Chinese?

00:19:42

#16C: It’s in Chinese. I’m pretending to read but I really don’t know, you know. So that kind I remember. Then I think right up to the 1959, 1959 my parents start to...ready to escape. We have yaks and they took some of our goods to Nepal. I kind of remember that one and every time they did was package it and get the yaks from the door in the evening and next day they’re gone. And I remember that where did my brother go? Where did my uncle go? Where all the yaks go? I’m asking questions like that. My parents were very, very reluctant to tell us because we are kids and somebody asks, we let go, that kind of... That part I remember.

Q: You knew something was going on.

#16C: Exactly.

Q: The yaks were there with goods and then they had disappeared.

#16C: They were packaging, you know in the night, hiding. They were packaging and putting away and things like that. The next day is gone.

Q: Were they...were they...later did you find out were they transporting the goods to Nepal to get...?

00:21:12

#16C: Later on they come back and little later on, maybe three or four months probably they told us saying, “We’ll leave pretty soon. Then we will go back to Nepal.” Yes.

Q: So what happened next then? You saw these goods being taken in the middle of the night...

#16C: Then one day when we left was, I remember that. Then the parents told us, they’re saying, “We’re leaving our country.” In order to do that, they made a huge bonfire in the house. So pretend that we’re living in it but we left that night with the yaks and everything, in the nighttime.

Q: So they kind of kept the home fires burning.

#16C: ...home fires burning and the smoke coming up.

Q: ...to pretend that you're still there.

#16C: Exactly.

Q: How many left with you? Who was in the party?

00:22:07

#16C: My dad, my mom, my two older brothers and myself, my younger brother...that far I remember.

Q: And the younger brother was he the last one born in Tibet?

#16C: No, no.

Q: There were even younger ones?

#16C: Younger ones.

Q: Where were they?

#16C: Well, maybe they are with us because they're so small. Probably carried but I don't remember.

Q: You don't remember that, yeah.

#16C: As far as my brothers, there were two brothers I remember. Three brothers and myself...four I remember.

Q: You remember four going with you.

#16C: Four brothers.

Q: Four brothers. Do you remember having...did your parents explain why you had to leave and...?

#16C: Yes, that time they're saying the Chinese are after us and in Lhasa that the Chinese invaded the Lhasa and...

Q: Invaded Lhasa?

#16C: Right and the Dalai Lama has left and so it's coming our side pretty soon, so forth, yeah.

Q: How far away were you from Lhasa?

00:23:12

#16C: Not sure, I'm not sure.

Q: You're not sure.

#16C: Nowadays they're telling us it takes in a car a couple of days.

Q: A couple of days at least. So it would have taken a good almost half a month probably.

#16C: I don't know; you're walking. Usually our transportation out there in Tibet is horses.

Q: Horses, yeah.

#16C: Horses are the ones fastest we can go. Then you got the yaks and oxen and things like that transporting the goods, but I'm not sure.

Q: So do you remember having any feelings about having to leave your home? Were you excited or scared or worried?

#16C: Scared.

Q: You were scared?

#16C: Yeah.

Q: Tell us about that.

#16C: Very scared, especially you know leaving all the animals behind, you know all the...your house, all the lands, everything leave behind. The only we have is whatever the most important thing you have in the house you have to bring with us, you know. But we are lucky I think they made couple of trips to Solukhumbu [Nepal] prior to whole family leave.

Q: Got it.

00:24:22

#16C: So that helped a little bit. Other than that we left like, I don't know, probably 8-900 sheep, maybe...[speaks in Tibetan] What's *dzo* called?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: *Dzo* is female yak.

[Interviewee to interpreter]: A female yak is known as *dri*.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Right. So what's a *dzo*?

[Interviewee to interpreter]: *Dzo* is a...

Q: Say that...

#16C: It's a mix. It's an ox and yak mixed kind of...I don't know...we call *dzo*. There were about six *dzo* and we have to take care of them. Some of them were left behind...horses.

Q: That must've been so sad because you were, you know a young herder boy as well and a farmer to leave animals that you knew...Do you know what would happen to them?

#16C: I'm not sure.

Q: Wonder what would happen if...?

#16C: I'm sure some of our neighbors had people who stayed behind there. Maybe some of the relatives behind there, but I really don't know. Maybe my dad and parents made some kind of arrangement...

Q: ...for them to care for...

00:25:42

#16C: ...care and things like that. I'm sure they did something because others we can help later on.

Q: It's interesting and maybe you couldn't know this as a young child, but it's interesting...Like I wonder why some families—and you had a large family—you know you got all these boys and babies too, why some would choose to leave and why some would choose to stay?

#16C: Well, in our family we all left.

Q: I know that.

#16C: Right, but I'm talking about like close relatives, you know they may have stayed behind, you know.

Q: Why?

#16C: That I don't know. Their choice.

Q: Do you remember how your parents felt about leaving their home and their animals? Was it...you can't?

#16C: I don't know.

Q: Because you were about 12 then, actually.

#16C: Yeah. It's kind of unfortunate...

Q: Eleven?

#16C: ...unfortunate that they don't share [with] us.

Q: They don't share with you.

00:26:40

#16C: Yeah, it's a kind of, I think again it's a cultural thing. All the family, family things, communication is not the best I can say, you know. My father and mother [didn't] say, "We're leaving because this, this and this." You know if you tell that then maybe we have some captured in our memory but nothing. Even we have to ask after, you know many years. We have to ask few questions that the parents don't tell us this and that. So I don't know.

Q: They didn't give a lot of explanation.

#16C: Right.

Q: Or maybe share a lot of feelings.

#16C: Right, they didn't.

Q: That doesn't happen in Tibet.

#16C: Right. No.

Q: Tibetan culture.

#16C: I guess not. I don't know if it's...I don't know if it's for everybody or it's just for my family. I don't know.

Q: You don't know.

#16C: Right.

Q: What about you know when you said even though they made several trips, you also said families would take maybe the most precious things. Do you have any idea of what or do you remember seeing what some of the things they did carry out?

00:27:46

#16C: I think I do know from our shrine.

Q: What did they bring?

#16C: On the shrine, all the statues and all the scriptures and things like that. They're gone mostly, you know. In our country we really, you know some people may have some antiques and good stuff like *thangka* 'traditional Tibetan Buddhist paintings,' you know things like that.

Q: Right.

#16C: Other than that you basically...you have your, you know *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' and cooked barley and things like that. You got lots of other stuff but you know, what do you do? You know, you can't sell too much in places, you know like salt. You bring from the other part of the place, bring a whole bunch of salt and store it for, you know, years and years but too heavy to bring and you don't need to use it.

Q: You don't need that much, yeah.

00:28:37

#16C: But I do remember all the stuff in our shrine like [points to scriptures] you know like scriptures and things like that and the *thangka* and the statues and so forth.

Q: Did you have a shrine room in your home?

#16C: Yes.

Q: You did?

#16C: Yes. I think every Tibetan family has their own shrine where you do your praying, where you have...bring all the lamas and monks and bring, you know when you bring, they do everything in the shrine. Basically it's your own choice in our country. You have your own monastery, yeah, but still you have your own house [shrine].

Q: Was there a monastery near your home?

#16C: I don't remember that.

Q: You don't remember that.

00:29:23

#16C: Yeah, but I do remember there is—you know I'm not very good at explaining—there is Pha Dhampa Sangay. This is not very far from my...We go there quite a bit for ceremony and offerings and get blessing from the Dhampa Sangay. There's a huge statue.

Q: So that was a temple?

#16C: Well, maybe call a temple. I don't know.

Q: It wasn't actually a monastery?

#16C: It wasn't a monastery. I don't know.

Q: Was there a lama in there?

#16C: There wasn't a lama. There's no monk or there are any... They come and go but there is a statue more like this [gestures off camera] like here, then get the blessing.

Q: I see.

#16C: And there is maybe I'm sure there is a lama.

Q: Was there a caretaker?

#16C: There was a caretaker.

Q: Was your family very religious?

#16C: Yes.

Q: Really? Why do you say that?

#16C: They are offering and they are getting, you know, giving things like that.

Q: That's right. So what happens next? We kind of left at a very precarious time where the family is now having to flee Tibet. Can you tell us anything about the journey?

00:30:49

#16C: Like I said we left from our country...our place in the middle of night I believe, like left the fire going in the house to get...Then we traveled in the night. In the daytime we basically sit and hiding where the hills are and where the Chinese won't see us. Again then we start traveling in the night.

Then we just crossed the...I think when we were at Mt. Everest, there's a path going. That time it was daytime and I see a little snow coming down and Mt. Everest where we cross the ice, I mean frozen and has a crack on it about three feet I believe and how the animal went in there and that the ice was deep, probably as deep as this building, one story...

Q: A crevice.

#16C: I don't know. [To interpreter] Is it called a crevice?

Q: A crevice is where there is a crack, an opening.

#16C: Yes, there was a crack on it and I see [a] goat running, running back because it fell down. That was sad. I see lots of yaks, sheep died on the road due to the cold weather and the, you know and so forth. There's no very good road because everywhere you go is rocks and the, you know, rough road, you know, they burn the feet so bad and then I think

there's no grass at all. I do remember that my parents brought two loads of hay on the back of their yak so they can feed...

Q: ...their animals.

00:32:56

#16C: ...their animals. Some don't have that luxury, some do. That I remember. I mean I can even picture right now seeing that crack come down and running that goat back and forth, you know. And the...

Q: Must've been heartbreaking...

#16C: Oh, yeah.

Q: ...that you couldn't help that little goat.

#16C: You can't, you know.

Q: So far down.

#16C: Yeah, so far down. Then some of them die and some of them, they didn't die, you know. Then you go...

Q: How did you get across that crack?

#16C: That I don't remember. I think we people can jump, right? But I don't know [if] the animals did. Maybe they're somewhere else. Maybe not four feet, I don't know. I mean I see it's nice and shiny down below.

Q: To a child that was a big jump.

#16C: Yeah, it is.

Q: So about how many people were in your party, your mother, father and couple of brothers...?

#16C: Right.

Q: And no relatives?

#16C: That I don't remember.

Q: You don't remember that.

00:33:58

#16C: There's...other people coming too.

Q: Oh, you're with a larger group?

#16C: Larger group we don't know. I mean not we ourselves alone. They're coming one after another. There is a ton of people coming.

Q: Really? Like a caravan almost.

#16C: Yeah, I mean, you know, the time is correct or whatever it is, you know, maybe my dad and...parents had some kind of communication with our neighbors, I don't know that part.

Q: So a large group. How many days did you walk or do you have any recollection how long it took to get from home?

#16C: I think it took three days to get from our place to mountain Everest base. Then I think it takes about—I'm lying or I'm guessing here—Mt. Everest's going start with snow and go end, maybe a day. Then after that you see rocks and then you know, bumpy roads. Then you go...then you are into Solukhumbu. Where the mountain base to Solukhumbu [is] maybe a couple of days' walk. Then after that your fear is gone because Chinese are not there and you don't have to worry about it. Then you put your tent up, then relax or whatever they're doing, eating, feeding the animals, so forth.

Q: Could we just spell that place that you went to Solo...?

#16C: S-O-L-O-K-H-U-M-B-U.

Q: K-H-U-M-B-U. Okay, Solukhumbu and that is in India?

00:35:48

#16C: No, it's in Nepal.

Q: It's in Nepal. Excuse me, I meant to say Nepal. It's right on the edge.

#16C: Right by the mountain Everest.

Q: Right by Mt. Everest. When you keep saying, you know, "we passed the base of Mt. Everest," is that the same location that we now call the base camp?

#16C: No, no.

Q: Because the base camp is much higher.

#16C: Higher, I mean Mt. Everest is 29,009 or something like that but we've not crossed. I think there is...Mt. Everest is like this [raises right hand from elbow] and right here at the base [indicates near elbow] there is a place to go. I wish I had a picture of it.

Q: It's like a pass.

#16C: Yeah, it's a pass.

Q: It's a pass at the base of Mt. Everest and it takes you right into Nepal.

#16C: Yeah, right.

Q: Okay.

00:36:28

#16C: We can bring yaks. We can bring sheep. We bring our animals. [For] some reason they don't bring horses. They bring the horses up to the base of Mt. Everest on Tibet side; after that the horses go back to wherever it's going. I don't know what is the reason. Other than that you can bring...but it's very difficult, you know. It's really high for the animals to walk through. Plus they have to carry the load on the back. I mean it's very, very difficult, yeah.

Q: So what is your next memory of this journey?

#16C: That's about it of the memory part.

Q: And then you're more relaxed the Chinese...Are there any Nepalese government officials there to stop you or greet you or...?

#16C: I don't remember.

Q: Nothing?

#16C: Nothing. I don't remember.

Q: Okay.

#16C: No. At that time if I remember right, I don't think Nepalese or Sherpa are not really...doing anything. The Nepalese Government has been pretty good for a long time until Chinese come in and pressure the Nepalese Government. Other than that I think...I don't remember.

Q: What is your next memory after that journey?

00:37:56

#16C: Not really much.

Q: What happens then? Do you go to...?

#16C: Oh, then after that we got up to Solukhumbu. We were there and I think we rented a place and everything was settled kind of, settled and then it's like, you know, it's like 1960. During '60 and then I think exile government sent some few of teachers to Solukhumbu. So they start teaching us some, you know alphabets like A-B-C and also

Tibetan. I remember that, going to school there for—I don't know—a year or so. It's about...maybe couple of hours a day.

Q: Really?

#16C: Yes.

Q: That was very wise of the Tibetan Government to right away start educating...

#16C: Yeah.

Q: ...because...

#16C: I don't remember exactly what date and year it was but I'm just guessing.

Q: Was that your first time in school?

#16C: Yep.

Q: How was that?

#16C: I don't know.

Q: You don't know.

#16C: I don't remember and when I remember, they were teaching us our Tibetan National Anthem to start with and then teaching us exercising. And then they start teaching us like I said alphabets and it was in a tent, a little tent.

Q: In a tent?

#16C: Tent, yes.

Q: The school...?

#16C: Yeah, the school was...

Q: A tent school. That sounds like fun.

00:39:47

#16C: [Laughs] You know you have your own house and all the kids bring into the tent and they start teaching. Then I...I was there maybe six, seven months; I remember that. Then my parents transport us down in...close to Khumbu but then...another camp by...right now they're called, kind of settlement.

Q: Yes.

#16C: They are old...then they start building, I think then some funds from Swiss.

Q: Yes.

#16C: I don't remember this...they start giving some lands, buying lands and then built some houses; then built some schools. Yeah, I went to school there for full time about a year.

Q: In that next place?

#16C: Next place, yes. It was called Sharkhumbu.

Q: What was it called?

#16C: Sharkhumbu. [To interpreter] Sharkhumbu is close to Pokhara.

Q: Khumbu?

#16C: It's called Sharkhumbu. ...is called Solukhumbu or some such thing.

Q: Right. Solukhumbu and Sharkhumbu are similar, right?

#16C: Year, they're similar and have the same background.

00:41:10

You have to walk quite a bit. We went to school there for about a year.

Q: And then what happens?

#16C: Then we went to school and then our parents transport us to Dharamsala [Himachal Pradesh, India].

Q: Right from there?

#16C: Right from there.

Q: How did you get to Dharamsala from there?

#16C: Well, we have to walk for a while. Then you go into Kathmandu, Nepal. Kathmandu, Nepal to India we go by train and then I went to Dharamsala for...went to school. Only I remember is going there and my dad told me, "You're going to go to school." And he left there, left; he's gone back to, back to Solukhumbu, yeah.

Q: He left you at school?

#16C: Yeah.

Q: Were you with any other brothers?

#16C: Yep.

Q: Oh, your other brothers?

00:42:10

#16C: Two of us, one who is Japan and myself. One older brother went to the army. The oldest one stayed with my parents.

Q: Okay. That's interesting. The oldest stay with the parents and another older went into the army.

#16C: Army, yeah.

Q: And then you and...

#16C: ...my younger brother who is in Japan right now...

Q: ...stay at the school. How did it feel to have your father go off and...back with mother?

#16C: Oh, I'm kind of, kind of used to it.

Q: At that point?

#16C: Yeah because...

Q: You're about 13 now.

#16C: Yeah, probably somewhere there. And really, you know it's kind of sad to see but when I was in Tibet even, I don't see my dad too often because he goes his way and I have to go on, and like I said we've three different places and we live...and we see, you know, here and there, off and on, gone kind of thing.

Q: I see. So it's not such a difficult separation.

#16C: No.

Q: Something used to it a little bit.

#16C: Kind of used to it, yeah for me anyway. Yeah.

Q: So there you went to school in Dharamsala?

#16C: Yep.

Q: What's the name of the school?

00:43:20

#16C: Well, I think it's called...below...[to interpreter] Is it T.V.C.?

Q: T.C.V.

#16C: T.C.V. Down below.

Q: Tibetan Children...

#16C: ...Children's Village.

Q: Tibetan Children's Village.

#16C: That was back in 1963.

Q: What was it like? Tell us.

#16C: Well, there are a lot of kids.

Q: Yeah?

#16C: And play, you know. Basically, you know, only we think about play and the things, you know. I really don't know. Then they transport me to Mussoorie.

Q: At what age?

#16C: That's about somewhere...still I'm 13 I think, somewhere there.

Q: Why Mussoorie?

#16C: I don't know. There is called the Tibetan Homes Foundation in Mussoorie and whole bunch of us transport[ed there]. During that time I think what they did—this is my own thinking—that His Holiness and the exile government collects all the children...come to Dharamsala and collect in there. Then they transport to different parts of the country like Shimla, Dalhousie, Mussoorie, so forth...Pachmarhi, all that stuff.

So some people go to Pachmarhi, some go to Dalhousie, my brother and I went to Mussoorie and he left couple of days earlier. I was, that was scary...the most was, I was, him and I was going to separate. That was the most concern and for him too. So I remember saying...trying to organize that...trying to tell him [administrator], request him to send both of us in the same place where he was sending [my brother]. And he told me I'm going to go to the same place next day and I asked him, "For sure?" and he said, "No problem." So we did.

Q: That was a relief.

00:45:17

#16C: Yes.

Q: What were the conditions like in Mussoorie? This is like probably 1963.

#16C: 1963. I don't remember what month and all that. It was nice.

Q: Was it nice?

#16C: Yeah, it's lot of nice...Mussoorie was very nice place and he was in Tibetan Refugee School; my brother was. I was in Tibetan Homes Foundation, two different places.

Q: The Homes was funded by Westerners and the other by the Indian Government?

#16C: Yes, that's right.

Q: Was that Swiss?

#16C: I think all over the place. You get funds from all, mostly Swiss maybe or from America and all that, you know.

Q: Interesting.

#16C: So I was in Tibetan Homes Foundation. I was there from '63 to '69. So what...seven years?

Q: What did you do during those seven years?

00:46:37

#16C: Well, I studied. I studied English, Tibetan, mathematics; we have all that, we have all these subjects, anyway, Hindi. So I was there up to 10th Grade.

Q: What were the...? What was it like to be in a country...because you were in India now and the climate is extremely different then?

#16C: We didn't feel it.

Q: You didn't feel it?

#16C: We didn't feel it. Either we were too young [or] not paying attention, I don't know. I don't remember anything that...

Q: Didn't bother you.

#16C: Doesn't bother me.

Q: Isn't that amazing!

#16C: Only I know it was cool and the school and the...and when I was in Mussoorie, we were in a comfort zone kind of, you know, comfort zone. You know you're happy and you got...Then you start thinking about your mum and dad and you know, "I wish they were here" and things like that, you know.

Q: Yeah, after you got settled.

00:47:41

#15C: After you're settled. That's correct.

Q: Can you tell us about the classes? Were they large, small? Where were the teachers from, you know?

#16C: We, at the Tibetan Homes Foundation do not have specific classes, but we have to attend our classes in the Tibetan School, which is run by the Indian Government. So [at the] Tibetan Homes Foundation there is, when I was there up to 25; each home has 25 kids. Then you have your foster parents. Foster parents oversee 25 kids and they feed you and all you need to do. Then older kids within the 25, you have to have duty to cooking and dish doing and so forth. I was one of the oldest ones there at the home and I had to do lots of hard work that time, doing dishes.

Then you have to go get the food from the, you know, from where we bought it, you know like rice and vegetables. There was, you know, it has one station out there, place go get it. Then you have to carry that in your bag to all the way where you live. Then you go to school, you know. Then we go [for] classes, go to where the Tibetan School is. It takes about I think, maybe 10-12 minutes to walking. We go there and in the class I really don't know exactly how many kids. Probably say about 30-40 kids in each class and the teachers are kind of mix, some Tibetan teachers and the English teacher and the...Indian language and English language are taught by Indians.

Q: Did anybody, like the kids that were coming, had they all come...because you were there for quite a few years and so, I guess what I'm wondering...children who didn't quite get out in..., well even if they left in 1959 some of them had rougher experiences than your family, perhaps...

#16C: Perhaps.

Q: Did any children talk about that or was that not...?

#16C: Never.

Q: Never heard about it?

00:50:37

#16C: Only what we talk about is "Where are your parents? Where [do] they live?" That's about it. And we really do not...we all know we are refugees. We all know we have difficulty. We all know we are living [in] this home under the foster parents' care. And

head of the whole thing visit once a while and telling us information here and there, you know how you can carry yourself, you know, doing, you know, way, you know, teach us the way, how you live, how you [on a] everyday basis, you know, how to brush teeth, how you wear clothes, things like that basically.

Q: They were educating you...

#16C: Exactly.

Q: ...how to survive and be in the world.

#16C: Yeah.

Q: That was a big contrast from living on a farm in Tibet.

#16C: Oh, yeah, yeah. It is.

Q: What were the hard parts and what were the good parts? What do you think?

#16C: The hard part is obviously losing our own country.

Q: Yes.

#16C: And then you do not see your parents for long time. I didn't see my mother for 12 years.

Q: Really?

#16C: Yes.

Q: How did that happen that you saw...?

00:51:47

#16C: What happened was when I left from Solukhumbu to another place, it's 1960. Then I left for Mussoorie. They tried to come to see the kids in India through Nepal and the Nepalese Government did not let them go to cross to India. They [were] stopped. So they go back. Then [in] 1969 I left India to [go to] the United States. So I didn't go back to the United States [Nepal?] until 1974 I think. So I didn't see my mother. That's the hardest part of it. I missed my mum a lot everyday, you know. Other than that, I mean...

Q: The hardest part during school?

#16C: During school, yes.

Q: During the school years you missed...?

#16C: Yes, yes.

Q: What did you miss?

#16C: Mum.

Q: Just having her there...?

#16C: It would be nice to see her you know, meet her you know. I really [wasn't] necessarily looking for some food or special anything, just see her, you know. Without seeing her was the most challenge. That's the worst part. The best part for me was, you know, if I lived in Tibet I probably don't have the opportunity to go to school. I'd end up going to...after yaks and sheep and the, you know, stay dumb basically. [Laughs]

00:53:25

So when you are in the school at least you know how to read a little bit of Tibetan, little bit of English, little bit [of] Indian language and little bit of mathematics. You have little bit...you absorb little bit education.

Q: Yes, of course, of course. So how did that happen that you...how did you wind up leaving to go to the United States? Had you finished...?

#16C: I finished up to 10th Grade.

Q: Up to...?

#16C: Up to 10th Grade.

Q: Tenth Grade.

#16C: Yeah.

Q: And then?

#16C: Well, what happened was in our, in my, in the Tibetan Homes Foundation there, where I used to live and they're telling me I'm kind of over aged. When you are over aged then I guess you shall live a certain age under...in that home and I guess they have some kind of rule and regulation from the, from the whoever is funding it, but that I'm not sure. So they told me I'm overage, so I decided to go to get some different education.

Q: Huh, because you were 21 at that time.

#16C: Somewhat...right.

Q: That's right and they said, "We have to have a cut off because children, new children need to be educated."

00:54:53

#16C: Exactly. So I decided to go to another place called Clement Town [Uttarakhand] in India where I...in Mussoorie. I went there for one year for try to learn typing. And I wanted to be a somewhat, you know, secretary.

Q: Clementpong?

#16C: Clement Town.

Q: Okay. Isn't it close to Rajpur?

#16C: Yes, it's close to Rajpur.

Q: It's in Rajasthan?

#16C: In Rajpur.

Q: In Rajpur.

#16C: Rajpur, near Rajpur, yeah.

Q: Okay and it's called Clement...?

#16C: Clement Town.

Q: Clement Town. C-L-E-M-E-N-T Town T-O-W-N?

#16C: Yeah.

Q: It wasn't a Tibetan word.

#16C: No, it's...

Q: Clement Town.

#16C: Clement Town.

Q: I got it. So at 21 you went to Clement Town and you were hoping to learn secretarial typing?

00:55:48

#16C: Yeah, I learned how to type and try to...Then after one year you get a little certificate. During that time I was searching for jobs and I was hoping that I may get some kind of job whatever it might be, you know, in the Tibetan Homes Foundation where I live. So then I went...After I finished it I didn't get a job right away and looking...and then I guess during that time that the exile government was ready to send 21 Tibetans to the United States as lumberjacks.

Q: I heard about this.

#16C: Yes, and the...my foster parents kind of told me about this, “If you don’t get a job and if you go to the United States, they are taking the list for candidates”. So, then I finished my...I think it was '68. [In] '68 I finished the, finished the typing and try to find a job and then during that time I put the application, send application to the Home Affairs of our exile government in Dharamsala. They took my application.

Q: From a typist to a lumberjack.

#16C: Lumberjack.

Q: What a story!

#16C: Yeah.

Q: From a yak herder to a typist to a lumberjack.

#16C: [Laughs]

Q: You could write a book!

#16C: Yeah.

Q: What happens next? So you did get the, you got the...?

#16C: Right.

Q: You got it?

00:57:37

#16C: Then I got it. Then you know, it took a while. I don’t know exactly but maybe it took eight or 10 months to come over and the...you know, you have to check your...health check up and you did all kinds of stuff. Then I...during that time I stayed in the same place I was most of the time. I help my foster parents [with] lots of stuff doing in the...He was in charge of the whole store at the Tibetan Homes Foundation. He had lots of doing...storing and go get the donation from different places, you know, like they send you whole bunch of old clothes, I mean tons of old clothes packed in [a] big box or sack and then you go in your store. You have to go ahead and separate them, you know.

Q: Organize.

#16C: Small to small, color to color, kid to kid, woman to woman and man to man. I spend [time] helping him there and then come to the United States in 1969.

Q: Excuse me, but who...you keep mentioning “my foster parent.” Who was that? Was he a real foster parent or just someone who took care of you?

#16C: People who took care of that 25 people.

Q: Ah, that foster parent?

#16C: Right, that's [who] I call foster...

Q: In charge of that home.

#16C: Yes.

Q: I get it.

00:59:00

#16C: So we call it *phatsab* 'substitute father,' *matsab* 'substitute mother.' Basically they're foster parents.

Q: Lovely.

#16C: We call father and mother in English and in Tibetan *pa-la* 'respectful term for father' and *ama-la* 'respectful term for mother.' But [they're] not real *pa-la* [and] *ama-la*, real mother and father, but you know, kind of step...not really step but in charge of that home.

Q: Yeah, they took care of...How wonderful! So you helped your foster parents...?

#16C: Then he, you know during that time, he kind of informed me that they're taking application. So I put application and they send me, "You are accepted."

Q: And where did you go?

#16C: Then I...Here we go. Then we went...They sent me letter to say we need to go to Delhi, New Delhi to go check up our health, you know. So we checked health and everything else and everything went okay.

Q: And then what happened?

#16C: Then we came to...we flew from New Delhi to Maine, New England. Basically I think we were landed in Boston, I think. [From] Boston to New England called Portage, Portage in Maine we were taken by bus and then sponsored by the called Great Northern Paper Company. [In] 1967 they took six Tibetans as lumberjacks. They were happy about that and then 21 of us came together. We settled there and all my airfare, all my passport, all expenses was paid by Great Northern Paper Company.

Q: Great Northern Paper Company.

#16C: Company, yes, and we have to pay back to them, you know like every time we get paid...

Q: They took the money back for the air...?

01:01:18

#16C: Right. They did everything; you know passports and air tickets and you know all expenses, travel expenses all paid [in] advance, basically.

Q: Did you have, did you get much money left for salary after they took that out little at a time?

#16C: Oh, little at a time. You know, I don't know how they did but you know, we get paid basically like, I don't know...two dollars an hour maybe... \$12.75 somewhere in there. The more you produce, you get a little bit more.

Q: What did you do? What kind of work?

#16C: Well, we were there and we go [to the] wood and they divide three of us each. One guy...two guys fell the tree, you know. We're 21 of us together but we're living in one section in one place in a trailer. They put as a group, a group working together but when you go in the wood, three people in a team and I [was] with two guys. Two of them cut the tree and [not discernible] it; I drove the...called skidder. It's a big machine and hook the trees on the back of the big, huge cable, hook it up and bring on the road and cut lumber like that, I don't know. Our term was five years.

Q: Wow!

#16C: And something happened on that business. It didn't go well and they told us, "If you want to leave, you can leave." So we...

Q: Excuse me, but can you say what was that work like for you?

01:03:08

#16C: It's hard.

Q: It had to be very hard.

#16C: It is hard.

Q: Tell me about it. What made it hard?

#16C: Well, number one, you have no clue for machines. You don't know how to run the chainsaw. You don't know how to drive. You have no clue. That's one.

Q: No training.

#16C: No, I mean...forget the training part. You don't have the clue of how they're run, you know. They gave us training for I think, I don't know six months or so but after you learn, I was pretty young; we pick up pretty fast, you know, pretty good. It is hard but most difficult is you got snow up to here [gestures off camera] and it is 30 below zero.

Q: Was it colder than Tibet?

#16C: Well, I really don't know.

Q: Okay, when you said—just so people know—when you said “snow up to here” you're saying your waist practically.

#16C: Oh, yeah practically. In some place you have to go like this [gestures off camera].

Q: Snow up to here is up to the waist?

#16C: Yeah. Then you have to carry the chainsaw...

Q: Oh, my goodness!

01:04:23

#16C: ...and then you have a tree that you are now supposed to cut the tree. Then you have to clean your, all the snow out of the way, you know where the stump is. Then you cut it but I'm not the cutter; I'm the machine driver, skidder but you know, we help each other do that. It was a challenge.

Q: Really challenging. Was it also if they were cutting it trees can sometimes fall...?

#16C: Oh yeah, you have to know how to do that.

Q: It could be very dangerous.

#16C: Oh yeah, exactly. You know, you need to know where you...They tell you certain size you can cut; you need to know. Then you need to know where you're going to...if you're going to...the tree is here [indicates to the right] then you need...you need to fall that way, that way, that way, that way [indicates four different directions], certain things, so your stump is sitting here then your machines coming from that end, then you have to pull it.

Q: And your job you said was to take the tree that had been felled...

#16C: ...cut

Q: ...and cut and attach some chains or something to it?

#16C: No, we have to have a cable.

Q: A cable?

01:05:32

#16C: A 30-40 feet long cable and the skidder [it's] called is a huge machine, a four-wheeler type.

Q: A skidder?

#16C: A skidder.

Q: S-K-E-E-T-E-R?

#16C: No, S-K-I-T-E-R, I think.

Q: I've never heard of that.

#16C: I've a picture I can show you.

Q: Okay, we can look at it.

#16C: Hopefully. Maybe, hopefully if I get Internet.

Q: So you...really, so you had to do that so that they can haul it away.

#16C: Haul it. We pull not only one tree. There're probably, there're about 6-7 trees and the machine was very powerful but it's very dangerous.

Q: Very dangerous.

#16C: The machine goes to pull out and you got trees, all the trees and you have to drive right in. First you have to make a road, you know.

Q: Did you drive the machine?

#16C: Yeah, I drove the machine and the...if [it's a] small tree the machine will basically break it but the big one you have to cut it, land it, so forth. But sometimes you have trees coming here [indicates right], coming here [indicates left], coming here [indicates front] because you know it's like that and you drove. You don't know where they're coming. That's very dangerous.

Q: Yes, exactly. How many years did you do that?

01:06:47

#16C: '69 to '71 or I don't remember. We did a year and half or two years, maybe.

Q: Very rugged work.

#16C: Yeah.

Q: Do you think they picked Tibetans for this job because they thought you could handle the cold?

#16C: I think that time nobody wants to do that job.

Q: Nobody, they couldn't find anybody to do it.

#16C: Except French.

Q: Really!

#16C: Hardworking French.

Q: French Canadian?

#16C: French Canadian, exactly. I saw a lot of them working. At the same time I was lucky that that time the machine skidder come. Prior to that those six Tibetans they have to work with horses.

Q: Oh!

#16C: Then horses do not speak Tibetan.

Q: [Laughs]

#16C: Okay? And they have to learn French; you know where to go...that's what I understood but I never had to do that for myself.

Q: So before that machine they used horses...

01:07:54

#16C: Horses.

Q: ...to haul those trees.

#16C: ...to pull the trees.

Q: Oh, my goodness! So you were lucky you came after the machine.

#16C: Exactly. I don't know...

Q: The machine spoke Tibetan, I think.

#16C: The machine speaks, you know, you know...exactly. So my thinking right now, I was thinking that quite a long time, if I had to deal with horses it's very challenging for me

to ask horses [to] pull that...for that trees. I feel sorry [for] the horses. I mean I don't mind riding a horse and go in and do things but you try to tell the horses [to] pull that log; I feel sorry for the horses.

Q: Yeah.

#16C: So I really don't know how I can handle that but my friends, those six other Tibetans had to deal with that.

Q: I understand how that would have been difficult for you...

#16C: Yeah.

Q: ...who loved animals...

#16C: Yeah.

Q: ...and didn't like to see them suffer.

#16C: Yeah.

Q: That would have been very hard.

#16C: Very hard. So that's how it...so...

Q: Did you eat...did they serve you...?

01:09:09

#16C: Oh, man! The food is fabulous. I mean, we have to pay [from] our own pocket but its kind of buffet. The food is...you don't have to cook, you came in the woods and huge building...you have your own room to sleep called...like a trailer, a mobile home. Then you have the cafeteria type, the kitchens, and everything, big building like this. There's a café...you can eat as much as you want. I mean you got mixed...from pork to beef to chicken and you get salad, whatever you want. Food is wonderful. I don't know how much it costs but as we go, they pull out right from our paycheck.

Q: Well, you were burning a lot of calories...

#16C: Oh yeah.

Q: ...to stay warm and to do that work.

#16C: Yeah, and then you have...in the wintertime you have to challenge with the cold weather.

Q: Yes.

#16C: Summertime you have to challenge with the heat and mosquitoes.

Q: I knew you were going to say that.

#16C: Man!

Q: Unbelievable.

#16C: The mosquitoes are terrible. See we do not believe in killing things and I tell you, man. It was huge.

Q: Did they...could you put any spray on?

01:10:43

#16C: They did. We do but still...one guy, my buddy...the spray, [he] cannot handle it. He basically put the one—do you call this...chainsaw oil, oil all over his face like this [moves hands over face]. After you look at him, all the mosquitoes stuck in the oil. I mean it's all over the face.

Q: [Laughs] Was that Tibetan oil of some kind?

#16C: No, it's chainsaw oil. You put them in the...

Q: Chainsaw oil on his face...

#16C: Yeah.

Q: ... to keep the mosquitoes off. They all stuck to it.

#16C: Stuck.

Q: What a story! All the men you were working with were Tibetans?

#16C: Yep.

Q: They were all Tibetans.

#16C: Yes, we have like I said six of them came in 1967. Then 21 of us came in 1969.

Q: And 21 more.

#16C: So we got all together it was 27.

Q: Did anybody...did you fellows know each other?

#16C: Well...

Q: Did you come from the same village or towns or anything?

01:11:53

#16C: No, I only knew...have a cousin, my distant cousin. He came in 1967 and he's my, actually distant uncle. I already know him. Then I don't know if you interviewed Tsondue Kunga [Interviewee #9C], the guy who opened here?

Q: Yes.

#16C: I know him from Mussoorie.

Q: Yes, he was from Mussoorie.

#16C: He was, he was like a...he does some kind of foster parent and all that. I know him there. Then I knew few people right from Mussoorie. Other than that I don't know. Everything [everybody] come to...came to New Delhi. After that, we all knew each other but prior to that few of us know each other.

Q: And it's so spread apart...

#16C: Yeah.

Q: ...your villages and towns.

#16C: Yeah.

Q: So were you sorry that you took the job or...?

01:12:44

#16C: No, I feel very lucky.

Q: You did?

#16C: I feel lucky, you know. I guess no pain, no gain, you know.

Q: That's not a Tibetan phrase.

#16C: That's not Tibetan. Well, I think that's what the...different phrase but similar to [what] we have, you know.

Q: What's the Tibetan version of that?

#16C: Well, how [do] you say this, the Tibetan version? It's actually said...[speaks in Tibetan] we, Tibetans say this, if you Yangchen will translate. [Speaks in English] No, I don't remember exactly. I better not say.

Q: But speaking of that you were a long way from home, you were now a long way from your mother whom you loved and your own animals. Were there any teachings or Tibetan beliefs that you found comforting to yourself as you went through these enormous changes?

01:13:37

#16C: Well, you need to look at two separate things.

Q: Please.

#16C: Okay. At that moment, you know, you had to leave [your] own country and the...and the...live away from your parents and all that, you know. It's very sad; especially you left your country and so forth. It's very, the sad part. The positive side of it is I think kindness of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the hard work and the community in the woods and saying...we got a lot of help. I think that's the positive side. My feeling is if I live in Tibet, I'm not...I don't see United States; I don't hear [about] any part of this world and it's a change in Tibet and then also I got a little education. That's [the] positive side. If I live in Tibet, I think I told you earlier I may not know anything; only I know is [to] go after the animals.

Q: I understand.

#16C: So there are two [things] to look at.

Q: A loss and a gain.

#16C: Gain, yes. Now, having said that some people might not like to say that, you know they don't like what I said because, you know that's how I feel. And if Dalai Lama is not there, then I think it's a whole different story.

Q: Yeah, exactly. Why do you value the Dalai Lama so much?

01:15:29

#16C: First of all, he is our leader. He's our god. He's our teacher.

Q: What do you think are some of his most important teachings for the average person? What is it that we need...?

#16C: Compassion.

Q: Compassion?

#16C: You know, love. You know, think about others more important [than] yourself, you know. It's in the Buddhist text but Buddhist text does not teach you unless you grab, read and understand it. The Dalai Lama goes out there, does it, shows it but then he practices it. In this world what I see is there are many good leaders but some of them are hypocrites, you know. Dalai Lama does what he says and sticks with it. And especially he works so hard [on] behalf of the Tibetans.

Q: What do you think that the Tibetan wisdom or how do you think the wisdom of the Tibetan people that they have gained through the teachings of the Buddha, what do you think are ways that it can help the world, help other countries of the world or people in the world because...?

#16C: As a Tibetan as a whole?

Q: Yeah.

01:16:59

#16C: That's a broad question. I don't know.

Q: Yeah.

#16C: I don't know.

Q: Well, you named compassion as an important part of it.

#16C: Well, I cannot speak [for] other people but I work here in the United States; I work in a company for 30 years and every time some people try to tell you something, I try to tolerate as much as I can and also if somebody is doing a bad thing, I try to stop and make him understand it...how it is, you know.

Some people try to lie to you, try to cheat you, [I] try to stop those things. I'm sure there are out there people better than me. I'm sure there are people out there worse than me, you know. I really don't know. But I think people, Tibetan people [that] work with other Westerners, many of them like what we do.

Q: What the Tibetans do?

#16C: Yeah.

Q: They like the Tibetan...

#16C: ...attitude.

Q: Attitude.

#16C: Attitude, how we bring forward to...

Q: The kindness...

#16C: ...the kindness

Q: ...and compassion...

#16C: ...and compassion. Also you go work out there. Think that you get paid so much and you try to give them a little extra, you know not leaving on that level. For myself I told my boss even. I said, “If you pay me a dollar, I try to give you a dollar and penny worth of work.” You know that kind of attitude you have and not wasting your time, not wasting your equipment, you know so on. You know, people...some people think, “That’s mine, I don’t care.” You know, attitude [like] that. I don’t think... Every Tibetan tries to do that, I think.

Q: Yes.

#16C: Some of them, there’s no...

Q: What you’re saying is kind of a spirit of generosity...

#16C: Yeah.

Q: ...and...

01:19:15

#16C: ...appreciating what you have. Wasting is a bad thing. If you go in a restaurant, for example, you order a food and guess what? Half of those are in the garbage. Why would you do that? You got your own...in country there have so many people dying homeless, already. Why would you do that? So that similarly is the kind of thing.

Q: Well, it sounds like something big happened after you left the forest where you were a lumberjack. What happened next?

#16C: [Let’s] see, what happened? Then what happened is that we were there for—I don’t know—a year and a half if I remember and the...one of the Americans, he lives here in town right now; his name is Don Messerschmidt. He was an anthropologist. He was an anthropologist; he was in school. He was working on basically Nepalese and I guess back that time there are no Nepalese in around here in the United States, back in the ‘60s, late you know, ‘60s...early ‘70s. So I guess he looked at it as some few Tibetans here in America. It’s a group of Tibetans, not only Tibetans...two here, one here or three here but we’re all together. So I guess he contact with the Office of Tibet. And get the permission and he wants to join and spend time with us for a while, which he did.

Q: Could you say his name again?

#16C: Don Messerschmidt.

Q: Don Mecher, M-E-C-H-E-R?

#16C: No, it’s long. M-E-S-S-E-R-M-I-D-T-H. I can pull out the...

Q: Messermidth, I got it. M-E-S-S-E-R-M-I-D-T-H.

#16C: I think. That sounds right?

Q: Could be. Messerschmidt maybe.

#16C: Yeah, Schmidt.

Q: Maybe there's a Schmidt.

#16C: Yeah, I can pull out the name. I think putting the name correctly is right if you want to put it on the...

Q: What did he do?

01:21:47

#16C: He spent time in there with us whole summer.

Q: In Maine?

#16C: In Maine. And we worked and he took a whole bunch of pictures. Some people call him a spy [laughs] because he's asking all kinds of questions and that, you know...I didn't pay too much attention; I'm young. His wife calls me "frisky."

Q: Frisky.

#16C: Frisky. [Laughs] I don't know what that really actually means. He spent [time] there and we're new there and then they told us all kinds of stories, you know. You know, we really don't know America that well, you know. We're stuck in Maine and especially we're stuck in the woods; what would you know, you know? He told us and I guess...Don's wife's name is Corinne and last name is Bishopbrick.

Q: Okay.

#16C: Corinne's father has his own business here in Warrenton, in Astoria...Warrenton [Oregon].

Q: Astoria.

01:23:05

#16C: Astoria. They came back here...two of them came here and they went to work for him. So we can go...leave Great Northern Paper Company anytime we want to because they ask us to go. So we called Corinne and Don, "Can we job get here?" Well they said, "Well, I'm sure you guys can get jobs here. Come over." So my cousin Wangchuk Dorjee and his wife and I came from Maine to over here by driving, you know have fun. You know, just came and see the country. It took us about two weeks from New England to get here.

Q: To come to Portland.

#16C: Portland.

Q: Oregon.

#16C: Oregon.

Q: From Maine two weeks driving. Who was driving?

#16C: Well, me and my...well, three of us all drove but I think I drove the most.

Q: That's quite a drive.

#16C: Yeah, it is fun. I drove and I was young and I got a license fairly, you know early because you know...

Q: You have a big machine to operate.

#16C: Yeah, that but driving a car and machine is little bit different. You drive the car in the highway and [it's a] little bit different. So we drove, we came. So actually we came and we land in Vancouver, Washington not in Oregon actually. Vancouver, Washington and then we spent a couple of nights in Corinne's parents' house. Then they tried to help [find us] jobs. Wangchuk, my cousin, he has kind of lined up his job because he wants to go to school and become a mechanic and his wife was a nurse. She already found a job right away. I didn't find a job right away. So Don and Corinne help me find a job in...around here in Clark County. I didn't find a job and finally we found a job for me in Woodland.

Q: Woodland.

01:25:21

#16C: Woodland, it's about 20 miles from here. I work in mobile home, built mobile homes for—I don't know—couple of years, maybe a year and half something like that.

Q: You actually built it?

#16C: I didn't build it. I was material handler.

Q: Yeah, material handler.

#16C: Yeah, I drove [not discernible] called a forklift and they're bringing a whole bunch of...like you got screws and nails and anything you bring in from the truck, they unloaded the palate. Then you distribute and organize on the shelf in the building. You know I worked there for a while. Then Don helped me find a job in the paper mill called Crown Zellerbach. I don't know you've heard of that. Maybe you didn't. It's a paper company in Camas.

Q: You want to say it one more time?

#16C: Crown Zellerbach.

Q: Oh, Coron Zellerbach?

#16C: ... Zellerbach. It's a German company. It's a paper mill. It's a huge paper mill.

Q: Okay.

01:26:27

#16C: I worked there for nine years. Yes. And the...I worked nine years. I did all kinds of...I made paper bags; I made toilet tissue; I made napkins; I made all kinds of stuff there. Work in a paper mill is make papers. You did so many different things. And worked there in different shifts. Nine years, then I think in 1974 I went back to Nepal [to] see my folks.

Q: What was that like?

#16C: Man, I'm glad to see my mother.

Q: I bet.

#16C: Yeah, and the...

Q: What did she look like after all those years and how did you feel when you saw her?

#16C: Well, I didn't think nothing about it but I always know is she's alive. Only bad thing was her eyes were not very good because she has a cataract.

Q: Cataract.

#16C: Yeah, cataract. Other than that, you know, I'm happy to see her and she was very happy to see me and spend time there. Then I met my wife at that time.

Q: While you were there?

01:28:01

#16C: Yeah, kind of. It's kind of arranged type. My parents and my wife's parents talked and we had a discussion and we married that year 1974. I spent in Solokhumbu called Namgyal Bazaar, which is right in Mt. Everest. Well, the country was lovely. I loved it.

Q: Beautiful.

#16C: At that time the country's not polluted, very less people and you know, 1974 is a very, very...

Q: You were around 26 years old?

#16C: I think 28.

Q: Twenty-eight?

#16C: I think, yeah.

Q: Okay.

#16C: Yeah. Well, my age is little bit...I don't know how we calculate...

Q: Okay, so around 28.

#16C: Twenty-eight. Married at 28, stay there, come back, work in paper mill. My wife could not join with me because I wasn't an American citizen at that time.

Q: I see.

#16C: And the...Worked and two years later, a year and half later my wife joined with me. We raised three kids together and [in] 1980 I had a job offered by Corinne's brother [who] runs a pressure-treating lumber in Washougal. He offered me a job. The first couple of times I didn't go because his company was fairly new and mainly he didn't establish any kind of insurance for the employees. So I was kind of afraid that...I have three kids and didn't go there. And last one he offered job in 1981 I went back to work for him.

Q: What city?

01:30:17

#16C: Washougal, Washington. There I worked for him for 31...almost 33 years. Yes.

Q: What was your main task?

#16C: Well, I began with supervisor. Then I took...after that, 20 years later I took as manager, production manager.

Q: But that's in Washington and now you live here in Portland.

#16C: No.

Q: Oh, you don't?

#16C: No, I live in Washington.

Q: You still live in Washington?

#16C: Yeah.

Q: I'm sorry I didn't realize that. I see. How far away is your house from here?

#16C: About 20 minutes drive.

Q: You forget how close it is to Washington.

#16C: Well, this is...we as a Tibetan community, we go back a little bit in...when we start coming back here in this part of the country and we.... Well, lots of us came here as we're...remember the Tsondue Kunga guy who came here? When I came myself, I was by myself. So I start calling my old Tibetan lumberjacks, "Hey, we get jobs here. You want to come?" So I helped them, about 6-7 people to get jobs here together.

So we worked together and we, here in Northwest we're getting a little bit bigger. So we established ourselves a Tibetan community called Oregon and Southwest Washington Tibetan Community. We created that and we celebrate. We get together during the New Year; we get together during His Holiness' birthday and we do things...Discuss how we can do better and how we can do better what His Holiness wants us to do and collect the...what we call the *gyedhun mangul*, that's a little collection every year. All of that we established it.

01:32:47

Back in the middle of the '80s then this resettlement came in...Tibetan, [U.S.] Congress approved the 1,000 people. So we here in United States, there are, you know groups of Tibetans like us, like here you got a little bit. You got in California; you got in Minnesota, all over the country there are...they try to bring like 1,000 people. I think our community here did like...I think we did the most, 40 people I think.

Q: Really, Forty from that resettlement?

#16C: Yeah. So my wife was very active because she was working with my kids. She really do not have a full job and she does part-time job. She and my cousin Wangchuk, they worked very hard to get established.

Q: I see. Wonderful!

#16C: 19...during that time and then, you know form a kind of committee. Lots of people helped and then try to find sponsors for those people and get bigger and bigger.

Q: Get bigger and bigger.

01:34:04

#16C: So after [that] we merged and get rid of the Tibetan settlement and get rid of the Tibetan... Oregon and Southwest Tibetan Community. So we create this Tibetan community here [indicates place of interview]. I ran as in-charge, as President, and we established...our Tibetan locals, established Tibetan name like Northwest Tibetan Cultural Association. It kind of set...and all kinds of foundations set it up. They work good and then couple of years later more people [are] interested and work harder and harder and get

bigger and bigger. And 19...what year was it? I forget. Geez. His Holiness came in here. Boy! What is it? 200...?

Q: Wasn't it in the year 2005?

#16C: Was it 2...?

Q: Wasn't it 5?

#16C: Maybe, I don't remember exactly. His Holiness came in and one family gave us one million dollars and nine acres of land.

[Interpreter]: The Lemelson family.

#16C: Yeah, Lemelson.

Q: Oh!

#16C: For us here in...

[Interpreter]: For the community.

Q: The Melson family?

#16C: Lemelson.

Q: Lemelson. Do they live around here?

01:35:33

#16C: No, they live here somewhere in...not in Portland. They live somewhere else.

Q: It's L-E-M-E-L-S-O-N?

#16C: Yeah, Lemelson family.

Q: And they gave one million dollars...

#16C: ...and nine acres of land.

Q: Nine acres of land. Is that where we are on right now?

#16C: Nope.

Q: That's somewhere else?

#16C: Right. So what happened was, we have a little bit [of] controversy and we have a little bit [of] mixed feelings within our Tibetan community. We are kind of a little bit, you

know, everybody has their own opinions [to] do things. So I took the responsibility of the...as a president in our board I ran this community for about six years. It was very challenging. The nine acres was pretty, pretty, very good neighborhood and they don't want any kind of association or anything with us. That's one issue. One issue is that when we build our center up there, it's really, really hard for us to raise that much money. Making a road itself is costing us about a million dollars.

Q: Oh, yeah.

01:36:51

#16C: Yeah. It was zigzag, hill. So then we are very hesitant [to] sell the place because somebody gave it to us and [if] we sell it, we keep saying moral, ethical. I don't know how Lemelson will be happy with it. So we talked and talked and finally I thought, "Well, better go see His Holiness." So I had to put application to Office of Tibet saying, "I like to see His Holiness and I like to bring the Lemelsons with me." It was very hard to get the audience, get His Holiness. So I had to talk to Office of Tibet about couple of times. Finally, he permitted.

Then I had to talk to the Lemelson family, "I like [for you] to come and see His Holiness." And they're, you know, they are not believing like we believe. They really don't care basically, you know. They give the money. I told them, "I have issue with the land and I like to get consent from you as a donor. And then I need the blessing from His Holiness."

We went in and met him. So then I explained to His Holiness and the...I don't know...the challenges we have. Basically Dalai Lama told me, "Do the best you can. And the best way to do is start with very small. Then get bigger. That's the way to do it." Then Lemelson mother says, "Well, that's the way to do it, then you need to have bigger land to expand later on." Then I said, "Well, I like to sell it." Sell the place and then like to get somewhere else in central location, flat, cost effective. They understood and finally they didn't say anything in front of His Holiness.

So I left His Holiness and walk with the Lemelson mother. She grabbed my arm and said, "If you need to sell it, go ahead and sell it. If you don't have to, don't sell it." So that kind of left me in the air and I said, "Mrs. Lemelson, it's very hard to build a place up there, neighbor issue, no money and so forth." So I wrote an email to the, to the Lemelson parents and they said, "Okay." They authorized to sell it. So finally we sold it and then we got this place.

Q: What an ending to this story of you being a little boy in Tibet to starting a Tibetan Community Center!

01:39:57

#16C: Well, this I bring up because [you are] asking questions [to] me and what I do, what I feel. I kind of...

Q: It shows how Tibetans, as you said, lost their country but gained many other things and one of the ways together with many people's help you were able to bring the Tibetan community

here, that live here and bring them together and today you've helped us by telling a story that we wouldn't want to get lost.

#16C: Right.

Q: So people will now know how this center, that started. That's very lovely.

#16C: I think this is mainly His Holiness the Dalai Lama. And then, you know that's the key of it. Then I think we all worked together even though we have disagreement whatever we may have but we end and what, two years ago His Holiness came in here and His Holiness was very happy and so here we are.

Q: So here we are. Well, we are going to have to wrap up, but I wondered if we could conclude by just asking you if you could just say a few words about what do you... What advice would you give to the children of Tibet who are living here now in this country because you live in this country?

#16C: Well, I think the most important part of this country, younger generation I think they need to listen [to] His Holiness' advice, teachings more precisely, more precisely. I think my perception is [that the] younger generation is relaxing [in] paying attention to His Holiness. His Holiness is almost 80 years old. If we lose him, then we have nothing left.

That's one that everybody needs to pay attention. Not even [just] the younger generation but I think every one of us. I could have done a lot better and others could have done a lot better but I think the younger generation...my age, I think majority have done well and worked hard and served the Tibetan community in exile [in] many ways. That's good. I think we need to follow that.

01:42:30

Secondly, I think people need to understand how important [it is] to raise all kids. Like Yangchen [interpreter] has two kids, she told me. We need to teach our kids how to discipline, moral ethics better. The way the Westerners raise their kids has one way, lot of good things. I think we need to copy that from them and also we, as Tibetans have to know how to raise a kid. I think we need to...don't want to lose that and put the good side and good side together and do a lot better than what we're doing right now.

I think that's very important and then I think lastly, I think I know everybody is working [for] our Tibetan cause. [It] is very important to do that. And whatever our exile government's saying...exile government leaders up there, they're all, they're all not perfect. I think we, everybody, younger generation need to say, you know, work in and check into those, analyze it, not ignoring it, give some advice, more involvement, communicating. I think [that is] very, very essential.

Q: Yes, that sounds like a...

#16C: Lastly, [my] wish is His Holiness' long life and hopefully on his lifetime we can go [to] Tibet and join our Tibetan brothers [and] sisters. Thank you.

Q: That is a very beautiful, beautiful ending. Thank you for participating in this interview.

#16C: No problem.

Q: How was it for you to do this interview?

#16C: Well, I'm happy and the...you know, but I don't know more details.

Q: No, but do you think it's important that we collect these interviews?

01:44:48

#16C: You guys are doing a great job and you guys listen to [what] His Holiness said. But now you're going to put it out to wherever [you're] putting it and people will pay attention now. That's the key to it. I think people [when] put the interest on it, I think it's very good. You know, this guy has this experience, this guy...I mean some of them...parents are passing their own experiences [to] their own kids and [it's] a good thing. The thing is [to] put in here [points to head] and use it. I think practice it. That's it, two different issues.

Q: You got to put it into practice.

#16C: Yeah.

Q: I'm just going to conclude the way I...it's important to conclude although I think you're pretty clear about this. So if this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

#16C: No problem.

Q: Well, thank you very much for sharing your story.

#16C: Thank you. Thank you.

Q: It's a great, great honor.

END OF INTERVIEW

