

# **Tibet Oral History Project**

Interview #20C – Hrithar Depom  
August 2, 2014

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# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #20C
2. Interviewee: Hrithar Depom
3. Age: 84
4. Date of Birth: 1928
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Chiplung, Tsang
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: August 2, 2014
10. Place of Interview: Tibetan Association of Santa Fe Community Center, Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA
11. Length of Interview: 0 hr 46 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tashi Juchungtsan
14. Videographer: Tomas Haywood
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Hrithar Depom was born in Chuplung in the Tsang region. Her village consisted of around 12 families who earned their livelihood by growing barley, peas and wheat and raising animals as well. She shares her memories of helping her mother in household chores, farming and milking the cows.

Hrithar Depom recounts the story of how she lost her father and mother early in her life and how her grandmothers raised her. She talks about her arranged marriage. She moved to her husband's village which was a day's journey on horseback. She describes her new life in her husband's home.

Hrithar Depom speaks about the appearance of Chinese in the region and she witnessed the *thamzing* 'struggle session' of a local leader. She heard of many other Chinese atrocities due to which she and others of her village took flight to India. She explains that the fear of being caught by the Chinese was so great that she has no memory of feeling sad in leaving her home.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Utsang, childhood memories, farm life, customs/traditions, *thamzing*.

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## Interview #20C

**Interviewee: Hrithar Depom**

**Age: 84, Sex: Female**

**Interviewer: Marcella Adamski**

**Interview Date: August 2, 2014**

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:10

**Interviewee #20C: Hrithar.**

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?

**#20C: It will be a pleasure to do what [I] can.**

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

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

**#20C: Okay.**

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

00:01:35

**#20C: [Smiles]**

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

**#20C: What?**

Q: [You] have no objections, right? Can it be shown?

**#20C: It can.**

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

Q: *Ama-la* 'respectful term for mother,' let us begin by asking where were you born in Tibet? What province and what village?

**#20C: Tsang.**

[Interviewee's daughter]: It's called Chiplung.

**#20C: It is the place called Chiplung.**

Q: How many people were in your family when you were growing up?

00:02:46

**#20C: There were my two grandmothers, mother and a brother, an older brother. Father had passed away when [I] was little.**

Q: What kind of work did your family do?

**#20C: It was just farming.**

Q: Can you tell us what kind of, what kind of things did your family grow, what produce?

**#20C: Crops grown were barley, peas, mustard, wheat and everything.**

Q: Was your village a big village or what size? How many families were in your village?

**#20C: There were rich and poor families.**

Q: How many people were there in the village?

00:04:15

**#20C: [I] wonder how many people were there? There must have been quite a lot.**

Q: How many families were there?

**#20C: There were around 12 families in our village and nearby, in the nearby village of Zongchoe were around 13 families.**

Q: Was it a prosperous village or very poor? What kind of village?

**#20C: [The families] were self-sustainable. There were three or four rich families and the rest self-sustainable. There were not poor ones.**

Q: Which kind of family did you belong to?

**#20C: [We] were middle class, neither rich nor poor.**

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Hers was very poor?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Some are very poor, some are very rich but her family is middle.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: “My family.”

[Interpreter to interviewer]: “My family.” Okay.

Q: *Ama-la*, when you were a little girl what kind of memories do you have of your village?

00:06:13

**#20C: [I] cannot remember anything but of working.**

Q: Yes, *ama-la*?

**#20C: How can one remember when one was little? [Laughs]**

[Interpreter to interviewer]: What age?

Q: What’s the earliest age you can remember? 10-15?

**#20C: Which one? What age?**

Q: Yes.

**#20C: What age?**

Q: Can you remember what you did at the age of 4-5 or at the age of 10-11?

**#20C: [I] cannot remember such things.**

Q: Did you play any games when you were a child?

**#20C: Oh, [I] have nothing to say about such things. [Laughs]**

[Voice from off camera but not discernible]

Q: Did you help your mother with chores? What kind of chores?

00:07:21

**#20C: What help can a small one give to adults?**

Q: Like milking, churning butter and various such activities?

**#20C: Yes, such activities. Helping with the cows.**

Q: What kind of help did she need? With animals or farming, what kind of help?

**#20C: With farming.**

Q: What did you have to do to help with the farm work?

**#20C: Weeding, plowing and harvesting.**

Q: *Ama-la*, did your family have enough food to eat when you were growing up?

**#20C: There was plenty of food.**

Q: What is the name of the monastery that was near your home?

00:08:43

**#20C: There was the Tashi Lhunpo [Monastery] and another called Khechoe Monastery.**

Q: What's the name of the monastery?

**#20C: Khechoe Monastery.**

Q: Did you go to Tashi Lhunpo when you were a little girl and what did you do there?

**#20C: [I] have been once.**

Q: What did [you] do at the monastery?

**#20C: [Laughs] [I] do not recall such things.**

[Interviewee's daughter]: One makes prayers.

Q: Did you make offerings or...?

**#20C: Yes, prayed at the monastery.**

Q: How often could you go to the monastery because you were working with, you know, as a farmer's daughter? So could you go often or what...when did you go?

00:09:59

**#20C: During Losar 'Tibetan New Year' after the completion of fieldwork.**

Q: Tell me a little bit about your mother? What was your mother like as a person?

[Interpreter interprets as: Can you remember what your mother was like?]

**#20C: Yes, [I] can remember mother.**

Q: What was she like?

**#20C: Mother was good, efficient and loving to the children. Mother was good. Mother passed away when I was 10 or 11. Otherwise, mother was good.**

Q: Sorry to hear that. ...[omission from video] to pass away?

**#20C: Yes?**

Q: The reason for her passing away?

**#20C: [omission from video]**

[Interpreter interprets as: From some disease.]

Q: Were there any doctors that she could see in the area?

**#20C: There were doctors.**

Q: Nobody could help your mother?

00:11:25

**#20C: Yes, [they] could not help and [she] did not live long.**

Q: You were like 12 years old when your mother died. So did your father remarry? Did you have a new mother again?

**#20C: Father had passed away before mother. [Father] was not there since [I] was little.**

Q: Had father passed away earlier?

**#20C: Father passed away when [I] was little and [I] cannot recall much.**

Q: So what happened to you next? No father, no mother, what happened?

**#20C: [I] had two grandmothers. There were two grandmothers like mother.**

Q: Did you continue to help your grandmothers with the farm? Did they live with you?

**#20C: Yes, the same.**

Q: Did you like farming or was it very hard work?

00:13:01

**#20C: The work was hard but one cannot shirk it for one must eat.**

Q: When the winter came and you couldn't raise crops, what did you do in your home in the wintertime?

**#20C: One did wool work, wool work and weaving.**

Q: So did you make your own clothes for the family?

**#20C: Yes, you made it yourself for there is nowhere to buy them.**

Q: *Ama-la*, how many animals did the family have and what kind were they?

**#20C: [We] owned animals like a few goats and sheep and also cows. There were oxen for plowing and cows for milk.**

Q: Was this a large herd of animals or just a few?

00:14:44

**#20C: [Our animals] were left with others to be raised.**

Q: Yes?

**#20C: Except for a few goats and sheep, the animals were left with others.**

Q: *Ama-la*, did you...after your mother died, did you get married? Did you have a new life?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: You mean the mother or herself?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: No, no, herself.

Q: After your mother passed away, when did [you] get married?

**#20C: Me?**

Q: Yes.

**#20C: [I] might have married at the age of 20 or 21.**

Q: Can you tell us how was this person selected for you?

**#20C: [He] passed away from an illness.**

Q: No. Who arranged the marriage?

**#20C: Whose?**

Q: Yours. You and your husband's...

**#20C: The family of the one who passed away [husband] and my father...grandmothers arranged the marriage.**

Q: Did he come as a *makpa* 'son-in-law' to your home?

**#20C: [I] was given as *nama* ‘daughter-in-law.’**

Q: Can you tell us about...you remember about your getting married, about meeting the person and did you have a ceremony? Can you describe a little bit of your wedding?

00:16:47

**#20C: [I] cannot remember.**

Q: Who was the man you married? Do you remember where he came from?

**#20C: [He] was [from] Digpa, Digpa.**

Q: Is the village nearby or far away?

**#20C: It was Digpa.**

Q: Digpa?

**#20C: Yes.**

[Interpreter to interviewer]: I think it’s nearby in same region.

[Interviewee’s daughter]: It’s far away, a distance of a day’s journey on horseback.

Q: Do you remember how you felt when you met your husband? How did you feel, this man that was selected for you?

00:17:37

**#20C: Where is the question of liking or disliking when [you are] given as a *nama*!  
[Laughs]**

Q: Yes?

**#20C: There is no question of liking or disliking when one is given as a *nama*.**

Q: I know that, no choice. So when you got married where did you go? Did you stay in your own home or go somewhere else?

**#20C: [I] lived in the same place [where I was given as a *nama*].**

Q: Your husband came to live with you and...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, she went to his house.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So she didn’t stay in the same house. She went to his house.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: His House.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I see. She went to his house.

Q: Who was in his house when you arrived there?

**#20C: How many family members were there? [Counts] There were his father and a paternal aunt.**

Q: Father, paternal aunt and mother?

**#20C: There was no mother.**

Q: *Ama-la*, was this a very different kind of house than the one you grew up in? Was it similar farming and...community?

00:19:22

**#20C: Similar, similar.**

Q: Was your life different in any way and if so, how did it change?

**#20C: There was no change.**

Q: Was it the same kind of work?

**#20C: [Nods]**

Q: What kind of a man was your husband? What was he like?

**#20C: Yes?**

Q: Was he gentle, short-tempered, capable? What kind of a man was he?

**#20C: He was a good man and not short-tempered.**

Q: What was [he] like in terms of work?

**#20C: [He] was capable.**

Q: *Ama-la* was married in nineteen...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...21.

Q: Twenty-one, excuse me, 21. This is 1951 you're married. Is there anything in the village...? Are there any changes in the village? Are there any changes like any Chinese in the area at that point?

00:21:06

**#20C: There was not any change. There were no Chinese.**

[Interviewee's daughter: Why do [you] say there were no Chinese. There were Chinese then.]

**#20C: Where?**

[Interviewee's daughter to interpreter: The Chinese came, Tashi-*la* and...]

Interpreter: That must've been much later.

Interviewee's daughter: It was much later. There was a monk of Tashi Lhunpo [Monastery] called Kupon. Because he'd left his things with us, our father was imprisoned twice.

Interviewer: It's hard to translate.

Interpreter: She don't remember much.

Interviewer: That's okay then. That's the story.]

Q: *Ama-la*, when you went to this new place, was it a larger community, more people or very much the same?

00:22:04

**#20C: It was larger.**

Q: Did you have a child around that time or later?

**#20C: One child.**

Q: After how many years?

**#20C: At 22.**

Q: At 22?

**#20C: Yes.**

Q: Was it a boy or girl?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Girl, right here.

Q: This is the girl right here?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Right behind us.

Q: *Ama-la*, can you tell us what was a typical day like in your life as a new bride and a new housewife and a new mother? What time did you get up early in the morning and what did you do? Describe a typical day.

**#20C: [I] baked bread and.... [not discernible].**

Q: How early did [you] get up in the morning?

**#20C: [I] got up around 6 o'clock in the morning.**

Q: What did you do after you did that?

**#20B: One tended the cows.**

Q: Yes?

00:23:38

**#20C: One tended the cows, did the milking and prepared tea.**

Q: How did you make butter tea?

**#20C: Yes?**

Q: How did one make butter tea?

**#20C: Add tea leaves, butter and milk. That is it.**

Q: And so after you made the butter tea, what else did you have to do?

**#20C: One worked in the fields when there was fieldwork and when there was not any fieldwork, one did wool work like weaving.**

Q: In your home, how big was your home? How many rooms did it have and how many stories high was it?

**#20C: It was two-storied but I do not know how many rooms were there.**

Q: I see, I see. Did the family...where did the family live in the house? What floor?

00:25:19

**#20C: The cows were tethered below and [the family] lived upstairs.**

Q: In this house, how many people were living altogether?

**#20C: The residents were as [I] mentioned earlier.**

Q: Yes?

**#20C: [My] husband had [his] father, an aunt and there was me. Then Kyipa was born.**

[Interpreter interprets as: Her elder brother and an uncle and aunt and her daughter.]

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Did her elder brother come to live with her? Her elder brother or the husband's?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Husband's.

Q: Elder brother of the husband. Okay. Was it...was this a pleasant time in your life? Do you have nice memories of it or was it difficult time? What was it like?

**#20C: There was nothing unpleasant; [I] was happy.**

Q: Were there any monasteries...did any monks come to hang out and visit your family?

**#20C: Sometimes?**

Q: Yes.

00:27:00

**#20C: There was one monk from Tashi Lhunpo that was a relative.**

Q: He came from Tashi Lhunpo to your house?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: What was his role in the monastery? Was he a monk or a lama?

**#20C: [He] was a monk.**

Q: He was a monk? What did he do when he would come to visit?

**#20C: [He] read prayers during the visits home. [The monks] have around a month's vacation.**

Q: Around a month?

**#20C: Yes.**

Q: While at home [he] read prayers?

**#20C: Yes, and then there was the monastery where [he] went.**

Q: Did you have a prayer room in the house or...?

00:28:12

**#20C: Yes, there was a separate prayer room.**

Q: Would he come like once a year and stay for a month? How did that work?

**#20C: There was [a place] called Yulgang where numerous monks from Tashi Lhunpo came for prayers. [He] visited us a few times.**

Q: What was the relationship between your family and the monastery? Was it a good friendly relationship?

**#20C: It is far, a distance of around two days' journey.**

Q: Was the relationship good in general?

**#20C: Relationship?**

Q: Yes.

**#20C: I do not know anything about a relationship.**

Q: When would you go there?

**#20C: I have been there twice, not more. It was far away.**

Q: You were married around 21 and your baby was born around 22 and when women have babies in Tibet, do they have help from the neighbors or is that something they do on their own?

00:30:12

**#20C: You did it yourself.**

Q: You had one daughter.

**#20C: Yes.**

Q: When you had that daughter, did you have to continue to do all the chores and everything? You had to still do the farm work and everything?

**#20C: Yes, one did until the birth.**

Q: Were you by yourself when you gave birth to your baby?

**#20C: [When] the daughter was having [a baby]?**

Q: Any assistance when [your] daughter was born?

**#20C: My family members were there. Who else would there be?**

Q: When did the life in your village begin to change? Were there any...things that happened that were different like the Chinese showing up or anything?

00:31:43

**#20C: The change was that the Chinese appeared in the region.**

Q: Weren't there many Chinese?

**#20C: There were many Chinese. ...[not discernible].**

Q: Were there no special changes that occurred in your village?

**#20C: Not in our village but the leaders of Tashigang were subjected to a lot of suffering. [They] were arrested and subjected to *thamzing* 'struggle sessions' and such.**

Q: Did you see, *ama-la*, did you see any of this with your own eyes?

**#20C: There was our leader who was a supervisor named Seray. We used to have grains to ...[not discernible]. The supervisor was captured and brought there. We were taken to watch the proceeding. The supervisor's legs and hands were [tied] to the neck. [I] witnessed this as [I] had gone to watch it. [I] did not see any other. The leaders were subjected to a lot of...[not discernible].**

Q: *Ama-la*, what did you see when you went where, to the village or to another village?

00:33:56

**#20C: It was at Tashigang where the leaders lived.**

Q: So you went to Tashikhang.

Interpreter: Tashigang

Q: Tashigang. And what were they doing to this leader? What did they do?

**#20C: The leader was already gone. The second one was there. The leader of Gyangtse...what is it called...I forget the name. That leader was already gone by the time the Chinese...**

Q: *Ama-la*, why do you think they took the chief away? Why did they do that?

**#20C: The leader was no longer there. The leader was no longer there when the Chinese arrived.**

Q: Why was the leader taken away?

**#20C: Yes?**

Q: What was the reason for the leader being taken away?

**#20C: The leader had gone to Lhasa to pay taxes. That must be the reason. The leader was no longer there. It was the leader of Gyangtse**

Q: When you went to this place and saw them, what were they doing to the leader, the second in command?

00:35:41

**#20C: [I] cannot remember. We were collecting horse feed...[not discernible]. We were forced to go and watch the proceeding.**

Q: *Ama-la*, could we ask...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I appreciate her cane but it might be banging on the microphone. Can you ask her if I can take it and put it on the floor next to her? Do ask her permission.

Q: So what happened after that, after you saw this?

**#20C: [I] do not remember.**

Q: Were you already a mother? Did you have a baby at that point?

**#20C: Which point of time?**

Q: When the Chinese appeared and were doing those things.

**#20C: I was in Chiplung then.**

Q: If that was like 1951 roughly, does your family stay in the village? Did they decide to stay or leave? What happens next?

00:37:32

**#20C: [Those people living] in Digpa could go to exile while those in Chiplung were left behind. [I] do not know if [they] were able to leave.**

Q: [You] fled?

**#20C: Yes.**

Q: Leaving the village?

**#20C: Yes, [people of] Digpa left the village and came away.**

Q: What was the reason why your family left? Why did they go?

**#20C: Because the Chinese caused suffering.**

Q: Was your family afraid that something would happen or what was the reason for your family?

**#20C: Yes...[not discernible].**

Q: Was there any reason, *ama-la*, why your family would be picked or arrested? Had your family done anything that Chinese didn't like?

00:38:40

**#20C: [The Chinese] caused suffering to others and fearing the same would be done [to us, we] fled.**

Q: So you thought if they are torturing everywhere they could come and get you.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Was there anything that you had in your house that would...

**#20C: [Interrupts] [I] cannot remember the stories much.**

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I understand but I will ask that question because her daughter brought this up.

Q: Was there anything that you had in your house that you were afraid that the Chinese would find?

**#20C: There was not anything except the things kept by the monk of Tashi Lhunpo. The Chinese launched the Reformation and confiscated these.**

Q: From your family?

**#20C: Yes, the Chinese took away.**

Q: They found them in your house?

00:40:06

**#20C: He [monk] was staying there then. It was not simple; the Chinese just barged in.**

Q: Were you scared when you had to leave?

**#20C: There was just the fear of being caught by the Chinese and no other.**

Q: Did you learn that the Dalai Lama had left? Did you hear that?

**#20C: Yes, [I] heard.**

Q: And so was that why you wanted to leave as well?

**#20C: I do not know.**

Q: *Ama-la*, do you remember when you left Tibet? Who did you go with when you left?

**#20C: With all the Tibetans of our village.**

Q: You mean there were many Tibetans?

**#20C: [Nods]**

Q: You went together. How old were you, about how old?

00:41:39

**#20C: Twenty-nine.**

Q: 29. Tell me about the journey from your village to, I guess India?

**#20C: In the night with laden donkeys.**

Q: Mules and donkeys?

**#20C: Donkeys. [We] journeyed only during the nights.**

Q: How long was the journey?

**#20C: It might have taken two nights.**

Q: Two nights?

**#20C: Yes. [We] hid during the day and journeyed at night.**

Q: Until the border?

**#20C: Yes, until Sebobula.**

Q: Where?

**#20C: Sebobula.**

[Interviewee's daughter]: Sikkim.

Q: Do you remember any feelings you had about leaving your family home?

**#20C: What?**

Q: Feelings, of joy or sadness? The feeling of joy and sadness.

**#20C: There was only the anxiety of being caught by the Chinese and nothing else.**

Q: Did you feel sad to leave your house?

00:43:26

**#20C: [I] was not sad except for the fear of being caught by the Chinese. There was not any sadness but the fear of the Chinese. One was so scared of the Chinese.**

Q: *Ama-la*, did you ever think you would go back to Tibet?

**#20C: To Tibet now...[Laughs] [I] do not have any desire.**

Q: What kind of prayers do you say for Tibet? What are your hopes for Tibet and the Tibetan people?

**#20C: [I] pray, All-knowing Buddha, may there be no sickness. Will praying for Tibet come true?**

Q: What do you hope for the next generation of Tibetans? Do you have any hopes or prayers for them?

**#20C: Pray well.**

Q: And not forget the dharma and culture...

00:45:12

**#20C: [Joins palms] Pray well that Tibet gets independence.**

Q: That's beautiful. Well, thank you.

**#20C: This must be enough.**

Q: *Ama-la*, is there any other memory or idea you want to share with us?

**#20C: [I] have nothing such to say.**

Q: Well, we want to thank you, *ama-la*.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I want to get her picture. Ask her if she will do that again, please.

Q: Could you give a little prayer?

**#20C: Okay. [Joins palms]**

Q: Thank you very much for sharing your story with us, *ama-la*.

Q: We'll pray for Tibet along with you. Thank you.

**#20C: Okay.**

END OF INTERVIEW