

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #22D – Sueshap Phuntsok Tsering
May 15, 2012

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #22D
2. Interviewee: Sueshap Phuntsok Tsering
3. Age: 80
4. Date of Birth: 1932
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Dachi, Lhoka
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: May 15, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, Mcleod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 30 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Sueshap Phuntsok Tsering was born into a wealthy family in the city of Dachi, Lhoka in Utsang Province. His family led a comfortable life with servants, vast farmlands and a large number of animals. He describes in detail how he was brought to the Namgyal Monastery in the Potala Palace and how he became a *dayok* ‘monk servant’ to his uncle. His responsibilities of a *dayok* involved working in the kitchen to prepare meats and vegetables for the cooks.

Sueshap Phuntsok Tsering later became one of four cooks at the monastery and recounts the different types of meals that used to be prepared in the kitchen. He talks in depth about preparing ordinary meals as well as elaborate feasts served during special occasions like the Tibetan New Year and other festivals.

Sueshap Phuntsok Tsering personally witnessed the shelling of the Norbulingka, the summer palace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He was very relieved to have the knowledge that the Dalai Lama had already fled from Lhasa at that time. He recounts how Chinese soldiers, ignorant about the successful escape of the Dalai Lama, searched among the dead bodies of monks at the Norbulingka. He and the younger monks of Namgyal Monastery fled without their possessions during the night of March 11, 1959 and were forced to become beggars after escaping into Bhutan.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, monastic life, customs/traditions, religious festivals, servitude, Norbulingka, Dalai Lama, escape experiences.

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Interview #22D

Interviewee: Sueshap Phuntsok Tsering

Age: 80, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: May 15, 2012

Question: *Gen-la* ‘respectful term for teacher,’ please tell us your name.

00:00:12

Interviewee #22D: My name is Phuntsok Tsering.

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?

#22D: Yes.

Q: Thank you for sharing your story with us.

#22D: Okay.

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

#22D: Okay.

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

#22D: There will be nothing. I will talk in clear terms about what [I] know.

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

#22D: Thank you.

Q: *Gen-la*, can you please tell me where were you born in Tibet and what year was that?

00:02:37

#22D: I do not know the year because I was not literate and we did not celebrate birthdays. I was 6 years old when I arrived at the Potala [palace of Dalai Lama in Lhasa].

Q: Which is [your] birthplace?

#22D: It is Dachi, Lhoka Dachi.

Q: You're 80 years old now?

#22D: Yes, 80.

Q: What province is Lhoka Dachi in?

#22D: Dachi is a city in Lhoka. There are others like Chidosho and Danachi. My home was in Dachi.

Q: What province is it in?

00:03:33

#22D: It is in Utsang province.

Q: Were there any large monasteries nearby?

#22D: There was the Dachi Mendoling Gonpa.

Q: Mendoling?

#22D: Yes, Mendoling.

Q: What kind of work did your father and mother do in Tibet?

#22D: [They] were farmers.

Q: How many people were in your family?

#22D: My parents had seven children.

Q: Where were you in the lineup, *gen-la*?

#22D: I am the second one.

Q: Can you tell us what was life like when you were a little boy in your family? Can you describe what kind of childhood you had if you can remember those days?

00:05:09

#22D: Our family and relatives' families were very wealthy. [We] were a family earning well in Dachi.

Q: Your family?

#22D: Yes.

Q: [You] mean...

#22D: [We] had servants and owned goats, sheep and donkeys.

Q: And with servants?

#22D: Yes, there were servants.

Q: You said that your family was a farming family. So, did they own a lot of land and a lot of animals?

#22D: The land was very vast. The land was vast and there were numerous servants. The house was nice and [we] were among the wealthy. [We] owned all that was needed.

Q: Can you describe what a large house was like in your family, your family home?

00:06:40

#22D: There were numerous people in our house with servants and a place below to keep the horses and donkeys. It was a wealthy family and everything was available.

Q: What was on the next floor?

#22D: [Ours] was not a house with many floors. It was single-storied. It did not have a top or a lower story.

Q: Were there no story?

#22D: No, the house did not have any story. It was entirely flat.

Q: Can you tell me some of your favorite memories of childhood from that time?

#22D: At that time I grazed the horses and mules. Being small [I] did not have any responsibility. [I] was a child, perhaps 6 years old that a relative of ours brought [me] to the Potala.

Q: Which monastery was that that your relative belonged to?

#22D: [He] was a monk of the Namgyal Datsang [located] within the Potala.

Q: Why did your parents wish you to go?

00:09:26

#22D: I was sent to get an education as well as to serve the relative.

Q: Could you tell us a little bit about what your relative did in the Potala Palace?

#22D: [He] was well versed in the scriptures and one of the senior monks at Namgyal Datsang. [He] was called Chimi Dorjee-la.

Q: Yes?

#22D: My maternal uncle's name was Chimi Dorjee-la.

Q: Your mother's relative?

#22D: Yes.

Q: Did he have any responsibilities, special responsibilities?

#22D: He was among the candidates for the post of *umze* 'chant leader' and was highly capable and educated.

Q: Was he an *umze*?

00:10:43

#22D: [He] was not an *umze*, but was among the probable and well educated.

Q: Do you remember, you're only 6, but do you remember the first time you saw the Potala Palace or had you gone there before?

#22D: It was a tall building and the palace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It was renowned and it occurred to me that it was grand.

Q: When [you] saw it...

#22D: [I] saw the Potala as a huge building and was amazed as [I] was seeing something [I] had never seen before.

Q: How far was your home from the Potala Palace, from Lhasa?

#22D: There were no vehicles then and it was around a two-days journey. One must journey for two days to reach Dachi. One journeyed by horse.

Q: Can you remember making that journey and who went with you?

#22D: There were [merchants] from Lhoka that sold wheat and such in Lhasa and drove donkeys. I was sent along with such [people] and brought to the Potala. There were [people] that drove donkeys then.

Q: Do you remember what it felt like to be leaving home at 6 years old?

00:14:03

#22D: I cannot recall clearly [my] feelings then—whether [I] missed [my] parents and did not want to leave or was ecstatic on reaching there. [I] was small then and like a child that had arrived in a new family.

Q: What kind of memories, if you think back to your arrival? What happens next? What can you remember next in your childhood in the Potala Palace?

#22D: Then my relative taught me to read the scriptures. I joined Sera [Monastery] as a monk until [I] came here. [I] was a monk of Sera in name.

Q: Weren't [you] a monk of the Namgyal Datsang?

#22D: [I] was supposed to join Namgyal Datsang if I could complete [my basic education at Sera Monastery], but [I] was not good in studies and had not joined Namgyal Datsang. [I] could not join.

Q: Were [you] living at Sera Monastery?

#22D: No. [I] went to the monastery when there were functions or when His Holiness the Dalai Lama arrived there. [I] wore monk's robes and went there, but otherwise, I have not lived in the monastery.

Q: Were [you] living at the Potala?

#22D: [I] was living at the Potala with the relative.

Q: Can you describe some of your experiences in the monastery, say when you get to be 7, 8, 9, 10, early childhood?

00:16:39

#22D: Then when [I] grew up a little, [I] cooked for the three of us including maternal uncle. There were *dayok* that were servants to monks; the name was *dayok*, Tse 'Potala Palace' *dayok* and [I] lived as one for a long time when [I] was small.

Q: Were you given the name *Tse dayok*?

#22D: *Dayok* means...my name is Phuntsok Tsering. The family where [I] served—for instance the name of the monastery was Namgyal Datsang. There were many children that were serving and the general term was *dayok*.

Q: Were [you] not [serving] maternal uncle?

#22D: [I] was with maternal uncle, but in general, if one was asked “where from?” the answer would be “I am a *dayok*” and not “I am servant to maternal uncle.” One would say “I am a Tse *dayok*.”

Q: How did you know how to cook?

00:18:13

#22D: [I] used to cook in the quarters when [I] was small. Being a servant, one was observant about cooking, as one must cook for the superior.

Q: Did every monk have a helper like you or a servant who did their cooking for them?

#22D: Most of [them] did; the monks had helpers. There were 175 monks, 174 plus one who was His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Namgyal Datsang [population] was 175.

Q: There were 175 monks and each one of them had a helper?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Almost everyone had a helper and from the 175, one was His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: *Gen-la*, can you please tell us what were the duties of the helper? What kind of jobs did you have to do?

#22D: The *dayok* did not perform duties for each [of the senior monks]. However, those monks that had titles in the Namgyal Datsang were obliged to send a worker each to the common kitchen of the Namgyal Datsang that was responsible for preparing food like *thukpa* ‘noodle soup,’ and likewise cutting meat and chopping radishes. There were around 30-odd children sent to work in the common kitchen of the Namgyal Datsang.

Q: Were the meals prepared for the entire group of 175 and then you had to bring them or did you prepare individual meals?

00:21:13

#22D: I was not doing the actual cooking, but went to work as a *dayok* then. Later I was a cook of Namgyal Datsang. [I] will first talk about the work of a *dayok*. The duty of a *dayok* was to chop ingredients for the *thukpa* and keep [them] in the kitchen. The cooks cooked and served the meals to the assembly [of monks]. There were cooks, assistants, etc.

Q: What about other things like laundry and cleaning the room? Did the *dayok* have to perform those services for the monks?

#22D: Each one did his washing; each one washed his own clothes. There were no washing machines like there are in foreign countries. One washed with his hands.

Q: Who did the washing?

#22D: My *jindha* ‘master’ did his washing and I did mine. At times I washed his clothes and we lived like a family.

Q: By *jindha* [you] mean maternal uncle?

#22D: Yes, maternal uncle.

Q: What was it like to live in the Potala Palace? Was it exciting or scary or comfortable or boring? What was it like?

00:23:32

#22D: I was a small child then and played around. I was happy and one had freedom. Everyone was happy.

Q: Did you have less duties in the palace than you had on your farm?

#22D: [You] mean at the place where [I] went to work?

Q: Yes.

#22D: When one went to work as a *dayok*, one must do the entire duty of chopping [vegetables and meat]. There was an overseer that was called *dayok gen*. The *dayok gen* was like an official.

Q: I see, a person who was like a master, an organizer of the *dayok*. Did you have any time for...

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: When [you] were living at the monastery as children, did you have time to play?

#22D: The children just played in front of the doors, but there was no going outdoors to play football or gathering together to play.

Q: What kind of a *dayok* were you? Were you very strict or were you playful or did you get in trouble? What kind of a...?

#22D: One did not wear the monks' robes but a red *chupa* 'traditional coat.' One wore a red *nambu* 'machine-made woolen cloth' *chupa*. One wore red clothes as a mark of being a monk. [Dayok] did not wear monk's robes while the monks did.

Q: Did you ever see the Dalai Lama while you were there?

00:26:21

#22D: One saw [His Holiness] many times. Take this house for instance: His Holiness' quarters were separate from the Namgyal Datsang. Located on one side of the quarters was [His Holiness'] room. Hence, it was like one family, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and everybody.

Q: What were your memories of seeing him?

#22D: At that time we could not speak to His Holiness like we do here. There were many restrictions involved. Except for [seeing His Holiness] return to the room after a visit, we did not have the chance to speak to His Holiness.

Q: How old would he have been at that time?

#22D: Two years after the passing away of His Holiness, the previous Dalai Lama, [the present] reincarnation was born. Therefore, His Holiness the Dalai Lama's age was...When I arrived at the Potala Palace...His Holiness' age was 24, 25, 26...I was 25 years old when I arrived in...

Q: When?

#22D: When I arrived in India, His Holiness' age was...perhaps very young but... In order to say, "I am 50 or I am 60," I do not know such things because I am not literate, having spent my life as a servant everywhere.

Q: Maybe I'd like to know a little bit more about how did the monks eat? What kinds of meals were prepared for them by you or by the kitchen?

00:29:20

#22D: Most of the time it was *thukpa* that was prepared in the kitchen because of the cold weather.

Q: What did you put in *thukpa*?

#22D: *Thukpa* was [prepared] in the common kitchen and there were different kinds. The first kind was the *mingji thukpa* [made with egg noodles]. The second one was *amdo shuril*.

Q: Amdo?

#22D: The one with round [dough balls] is called *amdo shuril*. The third kind was *tumtsa*—that was rice mixed with butter and meat. That's the one called *tumtsa*. The third was *dethuk* 'rice gruel' and the fourth was a kind of *thukpa* that was served in the [monasteries of] Sera, Drepung and Gaden called *mingtha*. It was thick rice gruel called *mingtha*.

Q: [You] mentioned some serial numbers.

#22D: Yes, [I] did.

Q: To whom was the first one served?

00:30:44

#22D: [The *thukpa*] were served during prayer assemblies. The food was served in sequence every week. There were times when food was grand. Grand food may be served one day and ordinary food the next day while on the following day, grand food may be served. There were days of grand and ordinary foods. It was like that.

Q: Can you tell us the five kinds [of *thukpa*]? You mentioned *mingji* as the first one. What were the ingredients in it?

#22D: For the *mingji*, eggs were added to the wheat flour that was thinly flattened. It was like the noodle from the United States and Italy that is machine-made. [We] made it with hands there because there were no machines.

Q: That's the *mingji thukpa*.

#22D: Right, that's called *mingji thukpa*.

Q: The second one *amdo shuril*...

#22D: The one called *amdo shuril* is from Amdo [Province]. Radishes and meat were added to *amdu shuril*. Basically it was wheat flour. That is it, the *amdo shuril*.

Q: *Tumtsa*?

00:32:00

#22D: *Tumtsa* is basically rice and is made sumptuous by adding mushrooms, *moru* 'edible swamp fungus,' vermicelli and meat. That's *tumtsa* when rice is boiled and the others added to it.

Q: Did [you] add butter?

#22D: Initially the meat was fried in butter.

Q: Then there was *dethuk*?

#22D: Yes, *dethuk*. *Dethuk* is thin rice gruel, like soup.

Q: [You] mentioned a final one.

#22D: Is it not the sixth one?

Q: Yes.

#22D: The sixth one is the *naycha* 'broken barley' *thukpa*.

Q: Yes?

#22D: *Naycha*.

Q: *Naycha*?

#22D: *Naycha* is when grain is soaked, broken down by stones, dried and then made into *thukpa*. That is when barley is broken and made into *thukpa*.

Q: It makes me hungry.

00:34:14

#22D: That is true. [I] will prepare all of these next time.

Q: Were these the main dishes that were served? Were there other kinds of dishes served at the monastery for meals?

#22D: There were times when grand dishes were served like *baktsa makhu*. There was the *baktsa makhu* and then there was one called *shamday* ‘rice and meat.’ *Moro* and vermicelli were cooked separately and served along with *shamday*. Then a typical Tibetan dish was the *bhoezay*. Things used in the preparation of *bhoezay* were pieces of boiled meat, dried *tsaksha* ‘dried yak meat,’ dried mutton and such.

Q: *Bhoezay*?

#22D: Yes, *bhoezay*. There are the *gyazay* ‘Chinese dishes’ and *bhoezay* ‘Tibetan dishes’ that we speak about. These were served during Losar ‘Tibetan New Year.’

Q: Please just take time to tell us what they are made of.

#22D: While making *baktsa makhu*, first you made *amdo shuril*. [Remember] *amdo shuril* that I spoke about earlier? One prepared round [dough pieces] or *baktsa*. This was boiled and the water drained. Then one added sweetened cheese to the *baktsa* and also sugar; sugar which is called *jemakara* in Tibet. And then one poured *makhu* ‘liquid butter.’ That is what is called *baktsa makhu*.

Q: Then the *shamday*?

00:36:58

#22D: [I] am speaking about the food that was served in the Namgyal Datsang during [my] time as a *dayok*. During the preparation [of *shamday*], Chinese [ingredients] like *dhesay*, *shamik* and likewise vermicelli, *moro*, mushroom and meat cut into flat pieces were [cooked] along with rice and that is called *shamday*. The main substance in *shamday* is rice.

Q: The third *bhoezay*?

#22D: When the *bhoezay* was served during prayer assemblies, the practice was like this: there would be a huge tray with numerous plates laid on it. In the plates were boiled mutton, likewise there was dried mutton, dried *tsaksha*...

Q: What’s *tsaksha*?

#22D: *Tsaksha* is dried meat of yak. Along with that were sheep’s head; boiled sheep’s head. That’s the way *bhoezay* is prepared. As per the practice in the olden days, *pa* was required.

Q: *Pa*?

#22D: *Tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ mixed with a liquid [water/tea] and made into *pa* was needed. Along with that was *chuchu*—it is something sour that grew on the hills and [tasted] like the lemon here. It was something called *chuchu*.

Q: *Chuchu*.

00:39:07

#22D: Yes, and then upon the sheep’s head would be placed a sheep’s tongue called *zem* and stomach. That’s the *bhoezay*.

Q: Sheep’s tongue?

#22D: Yes, boiled tongue was placed on the sheep’s head when a grand *bhoezay* was served. Then there were fried sausages, fried lungs and along with that boiled radish called *labu goptsoe*. Besides that was raw red meat that was minced called *shajen*. That was how we prepared it.

00:41:43

#22D: Then there was *masen* that was square shaped. It is actually *tsampa* mixed with *buram* ‘brown sugar cubes,’ powdered cheese and butter and made into squares like *thue* ‘soft creamy cheese’ and decorated with butter. It was called *masen* and served alongside the *bhoezay*.

Q: What were the ingredients used in making the *masen*?

#22D: The [ingredients] in *masen* were *tsampa*, cheese, *buram*, sugar and kneaded with liquid butter like *tso* ‘offering’ and made into squares and decorated with butter. Monks that were usually involved in making ritual offerings made the decorations when the *bhoezay* was an elaborate affair. Along with that was a large *shabaklep* ‘meat bread’ apiece for each monk.

Q: What did the *shabaklep* contain?

00:43:16

#22D: Like in foreign countries, meat was in plenty then and the *shabaklep* contained just meat that was not mixed with anything. The bread was large and each person was given one. There was nothing in it except onions and meat.

Q: During the regular days, were just the *thukpa* served that was the typical daily food and the special ones were just on special occasions?

#22D: [The *bhoezay* and the rest] were for grand [occasions] like Losar, Chapshug ‘Bathing Festival,’ Samdup [?] and Yarsol ‘Summer Festival.’ They were for holidays like these and [served] from time to time.

Q: Were there any precautions in the kitchen in preparing food so that people wouldn't get sick from germs or bacteria?

#22D: Earlier I worked as a *dayok* and the work pertained to chopping whatever [I] was asked to. Cutting boards were there in the kitchen and [I] handed over whatever was chopped. That completed [my] work. And then later I served as cook of the Namgyal Datsang.

Q: What kinds of regulations did you have so that people would prepare food in a healthy way and not get sick? Were there any precautions?

00:45:52

#22D: Unlike what is done in foreign countries, there was not much cleanliness that was practiced in Tibet. Sweeping and such were done only occasionally. There was not much washing or such responsibilities in the kitchen for the cook. We were four cooks in there. There were four cooks at the Namgyal Datsang during the time I served.

Q: Were there any special protections so that the Dalai Lama would not be given food that was poisoned by an enemy or something like that?

#22D: The practice in the past was that His Holiness, the previous and the present Dalai Lamas...I cannot recall serving His Holiness the present Dalai Lama when we were there. However, it used to be said that during the period of the earlier Dalai Lama, sumptuous dishes like the *shamday* known as *Datsang shamday* was specially prepared and served to His Holiness the previous Dalai Lama at the Norbulingka 'Summer Palace.' At that time dishes were served in earthen pots. Namgyal Datsang used to serve the *Datsang shamday*, which was loved by His Holiness the previous Dalai Lama.

Q: How did you get to be the cook when starting out as a little boy serving a monk and you became a cook in the kitchen? How did that happen?

#22D: [I] became a cook because gradually when you grow up, you must work for a living. If you worked for the Namgyal Datsang, you received a salary and a responsibility. That is how it happened.

Q: How old were you when you became the cook? And did you stop being the servant for the monk you had served?

00:49:48

#22D: Once you left the quarters, you no longer served as a *dayok*. Now you were one that worked in the kitchen of the Namgyal Datsang.

Q: How old were [you] at that time?

#22D: [I] was around 7 years old then. Yes, I was around 7 years old while serving as a cook [*dayok*?].

Q: How old were [you]?

#22D: Perhaps [I] was 18 years old.

Q: When you worked in the kitchen?

#22D: Yes, [when I worked for the] Namgyal Datsang.

Q: How old were you when you became...Did you become the head cook or just a cook?

00:50:55

#22D: There were four of us that had equal authority, four main [cooks] and 16 assistants that worked as subordinates. [They] made the fire and washed utensils. These were not small utensils, but huge bronze vessels for food was cooked for hundreds of people.

Q: It was a lot of work.

#22D: From the four men, we took turns for one to remain at the Monastery and the other three to collect tea, butter, likewise ingredients for *thukpa* for the next day's cooking. Weighing the butter and such work was the duty of the four cooks.

Q: Where did [you] go?

#22D: [We] went to the storeroom or office of the Namgyal Datsang. It is called the *chanzokhang* 'office of the business manager.'

Q: Did [you] have to go to bring [the requirements]?

#22D: [The requirements] must be brought from there to the kitchen. Then it was cooked in the kitchen.

Q: Was there one [cook] to do the cooking?

00:52:25

#22D: There was one cook that stayed back with the assistants, some of whom were assigned to light the fire and likewise to prepare tea. There were 16 assistants to do the job. Three men left to collect [the requirements] while one stayed back in the kitchen.

Q: That was a question I had. Where did this food come from? Who paid for it?

#22D: As for the butter and such, there were [people] that brought them because groups of *dri* 'female yak' and yak had been left [with them]. Nomads that lived there supplied the butter stock annually. Animals that belonged to the monastery had been given [to the nomads].

Q: Where did the slaughtered animals come from?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: You mean the food?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The food, yeah. The animals that were killed for eating, the mutton, yak, where did they come from?

#22D: The meat was purchased in Lhasa or at Dhampagyu at the base of Drepung [Monastery] from butchers that sold meat. [The meat] was bought from them, whether it was eight, nine or seven sheep carcasses. The meat must be purchased from the butchers.

Q: How was the meat preserved so it didn't go bad?

#22D: Meat [to be used] the next day would be received the previous evening. They were suspended on metal hooks and used the next day. There were never any refrigerators to be heard of.

Q: *Gen-la*, were there ever any food shortages in Tibet while you were working in the kitchen as a cook?

00:56:25

#22D: How?

Q: You said that you served as a cook for around eight years.

#22D: Yes, yes.

Q: During this period, was there food...?

#22D: Like scarcity and starvation?

Q: Yes, has it ever happened?

#22D: It has never happened.

Q: Was the Dalai Lama's food prepared in a separate place from where the monks' food was prepared?

#22D: Where?

Q: At the Potala palace.

#22D: During [His Holiness'] stay at the Potala, there was a separate [kitchen] called *sulthap* that was [managed] by monks or should [I] say aristocrats.

Q: Were [they] the cooks that prepared food in the kitchen?

00:57:21

#22D: Yes, cooks. There were many monks in the *sulthap* but they did not prepare the food. There was a separate cook called *gyaser majin* that cooked for His Holiness at the Potala and at the Norbulingka.

Q: If you were at the Potala palace for eight years, you actually watched the Dalai Lama grow up for eight years from the time he was about 16 to 24 because you were about 18 to 26.

#22D: Before His Holiness [took over], Reting was the regent of Tibet. Then it was Tadaktsang that ruled. Later the reign was offered to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. There were certain things that occurred with the Reting Lama and others, but I have nothing to say about that.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama studied the scriptures and then took the *geshe* ‘Buddhist philosophy’ degree. [His Holiness] took the *geshe* examination and offerings at the Sera, Drepung and Gaden [Monasteries]. His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave his *geshe* examination and made offerings during the assembly of monks of Sera, Drepung and Gaden [Monasteries] during the Monlam ‘Prayer Festival’ in Lhasa. It was like that and then His Holiness took over political and religious duties. Likewise, [he] visited the monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Gaden and made offerings to all the monks and undertook the *geshe* examinations. After completing all the ceremonies, [His Holiness] took over the reigns of the Tibetan Government.

01:01:22

[Monks of] Sera, Drepung and Gaden [Monasteries] assembled for [the Monlam]. [His Holiness] attended it. The Monlam went on for 21 days.

Q: Do you remember those times, especially the Monlam? Were you doing anything special? Were you having to cook a lot? Were you participating? Where were you in that historical time?

#22D: I had to cook for the monks of Namgyal Datsang. One must prepare the regular meals like *thukpa* and serve the mid-day meals.

Q: Did [you] go there?

#22D: Only a certain number attended there. Not all the monks went there. Around half the number of monks attended the Monlam.

Q: Did half of the monks stay at the Datsang?

#22D: Half the number stayed back while half attended, as there were preparations for the rituals, organizing ceremonies during His Holiness’ visits and a host of things that needed to be done. Hence, around half the number of monks left to conduct these things.

Q: Did [you] have to go to cook for the half that went there?

01:02:56

#22D: One of the cooks went there and when there was not much work at the Potala, the others went to provide assistance. There was a separate kitchen at Lhasa called *chutikhang* for the Namgyal Datsang.

Q: In Lhasa?

#22D: Yes.

Q: Are there any special memories that you have of working in that kitchen that you still think about with either pleasure or sadness? Any event that happened in that kitchen that's a part of your memory?

#22D: At that time it only pertained to happenings in Tibet. One worked for a living and received a salary as it is here or in foreign countries. The most disturbing event that happened in Lhasa was His Holiness the Dalai Lama's visit to China. That was the most disturbing [event] and filled one with panic.

Q: Can you tell us what were you worried about? What were you worried about?

01:05:26

#22D: Just like one has an opinion, this is my opinion. When His Holiness is invited to China, it is difficult [to believe] that they [the Chinese] are doing it for a good reason. They invited [His Holiness] there to fulfill their many purposes. And for reasons of their purposes not being met, [I] was filled with dread and panic then that they might put His Holiness in jail and that he may never be able to return to Tibet. That was my worry.

Q: That the Chinese would put [His Holiness] in prison?

#22D: Yes, there was the danger then of [His Holiness] not being allowed to return but detained there. However, due to our protective deities and His Holiness the Dalai Lama's virtue, he was able to return. [I] do not know how they [the Chinese] were fooled but the protective deities rightfully escorted [His Holiness] back.

Q: What do you remember about later in Tibet history when the Chinese began to come into Tibet? What's the first memory you personally have of knowing about the Chinese invasion of Tibet?

#22D: As [I] look back I realize that we were completely muddled because after the implementation of liberation in Sining in China, though we observed these people being subjected to road construction and forced labor in Lhasa, yet it never crossed anybody's mind. It did not cross my mind then.

Q: When did it start to dawn on you that there was a serious problem?

01:09:03

#22D: There were various rumors one heard at that time, and they [the Chinese] were implementing liberation in the Chamdo areas and did not heed the orders of the Tibetan Government. [We] were witness to the poor clothes and food of the laboring Chinese from Sining and elsewhere. People remarked that the aristocrats of the Tibetan Government at that time were being swayed by *dhayen* ‘Chinese silver coins.’ People spoke about various things. Never mind being swayed by *dhayen*, all the people including the aristocrats...If [we] go by present times, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been able to arrive in India and is renowned presently, which is the work of the aristocrats.

Q: Who were those people that worked hard?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The aristocrats.

Q: What do you remember about that time when His Holiness left the Potala...Hh, he was in the summer palace, Norbulingka, right?

#22D: Yes, [His Holiness] was living at the Norbulingka. Earlier in Tibet...there is not much to say, but after the liberation in Chamdo the so-called 17-Point Agreement was falsely fabricated in China which could not be acknowledged. There were the three monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Gaden. The Chinese said this about the three monasteries, “There is a tree in Tibet. Under this tree are three red worms.” You know the long red worms? “There are three such worms. If this tree is uprooted, the red worms will wither.” They said thus when the 17-Point Agreement was not accepted. Of course, one would be alarmed.

Q: Do you remember the night or the day what you were doing when His Holiness was in Norbulingka and they were firing on the Potala palace?

01:14:03

#22D: Deep in [my] heart then...They [the Chinese] announced to the world that Tibet was liberated peacefully. If Tibet was liberated peacefully, it would mean holding talks and coming to an agreeable conclusion. According to my mind [they] bombarded Tibet with cannons and killed and severed millions of people, which have caused incredible grief in our hearts.

Q: *Gen-la*, I’m trying to understand where you were as an individual in this big historical moment? Were you cooking in the kitchen? Were you home packing to flee Tibet? What were you doing when the Potala Palace was surrounded and guns were firing? Where were you?

#22D: At that time everybody was relaxed, as the firing had not begun. And then the Chinese said that they wanted to invite His Holiness the Dalai Lama for a feast to their autonomous region. That’s what they said. Kungo Depon, Phala and the aristocrats became aware of the critical situation [and said], “[The Chinese] will come to the Norbulingka to escort His Holiness the Dalai Lama. You, the people must lie upon the roads and stop His Holiness if he leaves.” From the Potala [I] could see all the people of Lhasa gather.

Q: What did you feel when you saw that?

#22D: The firing had not started then. His Holiness left, left on the escape journey, when the people gathered there. [I] do not know if other people were aware of His Holiness' escape but I knew it. A young man told me that His Holiness had left the previous night.

Q: Who told [you]?

01:18:03

#22D: There was a young man called Tseten Lhundup who lived in our quarters. He had been in conversation with some people who worked in the Norbulingka that told [him], "His Holiness the Dalai Lama has fled." I was filled with panic and dread then that His Holiness would fall into Chinese hands, and I told him, "I swear on the name of Palden Lhamo 'a protective deity,' you should never utter such things. Please do not ever let this be known." I stopped him from speaking of it.

Q: Why were you shocked and why did you think he shouldn't repeat these things?

#22D: I thought that the Chinese would pursue His Holiness the Dalai Lama at once and in case [they] got His Holiness in [their] hands, [they] would either kill or capture him. I was so filled with incredible panic that I almost lost consciousness.

Q: Was it said that His Holiness had already left for India?

#22D: No, [His Holiness] had left from Norbulingka and then the shelling started.

Q: It wasn't said that [His Holiness] had left for India?

#22D: It was said that [His Holiness] had escaped.

Q: When it was said that [His Holiness] had escaped, was it mentioned that [His Holiness] had left for India or...?

01:19:58

#22: It was not mentioned [that His Holiness had left for India] but just that [he] had escaped.

Q: [You] weren't aware where [His Holiness] had left?

#22D: [I] did not know that.

Q: I see, so you thought that had [His Holiness] fallen into the hands of the Chinese...

#22D: ...That [the Chinese] would pursue [him]. Had he [young man] mentioned to the Chinese what he had told me, the Chinese would send troops to Lhoka and seek out His Holiness. Hence, I told him not to reveal such things due to my panic.

Q: So your wish was to not spread the news so His Holiness would not be pursued?

#22D: [Then the Chinese would believe that His Holiness] was still living in the Norbulingka. And they did believe that.

We at the Potala...And then the shelling began and [people] lamented over the fate of His Holiness in the Norbulingka. Numerous people were being killed in Lhasa and surrounding areas from artillery shelling on the 11th [of March]. One could not see anything due to the innumerable firing. They [the Chinese] fired from different directions with the intention to kill His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: What did you do?

01:22:12

#22D: When the shelling began, people lamented over His Holiness in the Norbulingka. Like me, no one could remember that the young man had spoken about His Holiness' escape. Then it dawned on me that no matter the amount of firing, His Holiness was no longer there. It made me incredibly happy when there was the firing.

Q: You knew he wasn't going to get hurt or killed.

#22D: Yes, and I was incredibly happy.

Q: What did you do next?

#22D: There was nothing that I could do when Norbulingka was shelled. Innumerable monks and people were killed at the Norbulingka. The Chinese entered and turned over all the monks' [bodies] shouting, "Dalai Lama. Dalai Lama." They were totally confused. It has been extremely good which was due to our protective deities.

Q: Where did you go?

#22D: It was the 11th day and after His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left, they [the Chinese] upturned all the monks' [bodies] in the Norbulingka shouting for the Dalai Lama. That was done for sure. As is mentioned in His Holiness' books, just before the escape, His Holiness went into the Gonpokhang 'room of the protective deities' and offered prayers. The Chinese entered the Gonpokhang and searched saying, "Dalai Lama. Dalai Lama." Due to the blessings of the gods, it has been extremely good for us. They [the Chinese] were totally confused. What they are doing to His Holiness the Panchen Lama now, we have succeeded in fooling them.

Q: Where did you go?

01:24:45

#22D: I was at the Potala then when the shelling occurred.

Q: When did you escape?

#22D: I fled in the night of the 11th.

Q: Where to?

#22D: Those that escaped were the young monks of Namgyal Datsang while the aged ones were left behind. There were also soldiers that lived at the Potala and individual people as well. The escapees from Potala exited from the Thago [one of the gates at the Potala Palace] through Phenpo and crossed the Phenpo pass.

Q: You were saying that on the night of the 11th all the young monks left the monastery and fled through Phenpo and the older ones remained behind.

#22D: That is right, [the older ones] were left behind.

Q: [You] escaped through Phenpo.

01:26:16

#22D: Yes, [we] came through Phenpo. We carried a gun, each in vain. There were guns at the Potala, the long type that the Indian police use, which were useless.

Q: Do you know how the old ones felt about staying behind? Was that their choice or were they just left behind?

#22D: When the escapees were gone, they were left behind for good. [They] could not come and had to stay back, as it was their home.

Q: They could not come.

#22D: Yes, [they] were the old ones.

Q: In conclusion, could you just tell us how did it feel to you to be leaving the Potala Palace, but knowing you were going to see His Holiness again or hope to?

#22D: [I] had that very thought. When I left the Potala, I carried the small amount of *tamka karmo*, a Tibetan Government currency, that I possessed. When [I] reached there, [I] was a beggar with not even a cup. It occurred to me that the storehouse of the Tibetan Government at the Potala, [His Holiness]' belongings and the palace were left behind and it brought me solace [that what I had lost was nothing]. There was no worry.

Q: [You] had a small amount of *tamka karmo* when [you] left the Potala?

01:28:16

#22D: [I] intended to enter India through Bhutan right from the start.

Q: Did [you] say that the Palace and everything of the Tibetan Government was left behind?

#22D: I had managed to escape but did not have living quarters or blankets to wear and had become a beggar. Of course, one was filled with sadness. However, the storehouses of the Tibetan Government, likewise the palace and indescribable things in it have been left behind. When one thinks of such things, we are just nothing. So, it sort of brought solace.

Q: Are there any words of advice you would like to give to the next generation of Tibetan people, the children coming up?

#22D: The main thing is one's tradition. His Holiness the Dalai Lama gives a lot of advice these days. A hundred from us is equal to His Holiness giving one [piece of advice]. If the children would heed, it would benefit them very much.

Q: Thank you so much, *gen-la*.

END OF INTERVIEW