

# **Tibet Oral History Project**

Interview #27D – Dolma (alias)  
May 20, 2012

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# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #27D
2. Interviewee: Dolma (alias)
3. Age: 81
4. Date of Birth: 1931
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Gonjo
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1963
9. Date of Interview: May 20, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, Mcleod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 35 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Thupten Kelsang Dakpa
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Dolma is from Gonjo in Kham Province where she worked in the fields and grazed animals as a young girl. She recalls that no money was used and everyone produced their own food and clothing. She was fortunate to be taught a little reading and attempted a few times to run away to Lhasa with other village girls. Dolma married a trader from Amdo and they decided to go to Lhasa after he travelled to China and anticipated problems soon coming to Tibet.

Dolma remembers the turmoil in Lhasa and the decision of her husband to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* Defend Tibet Volunteer Force to resist the Chinese onslaught. She recounts the horrifying experiences she underwent along with her one- year old son after her husband left. Dolma was arrested after the March 10<sup>th</sup> uprising in Lhasa and subjected to forced labor. She recalls stories of the prisons and many deaths and suicides as well as starvation due to severely limited rations.

Dolma narrates how the Chinese caught her twice as she fled from her home in Lhasa. She talks about the experiences of being the wife of a “rebel” as the Chinese labeled her. Dolma briefly describes her third and final attempt to escape into Bhutan and her fortunate reunion with her husband.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Childhood memories, life under Chinese rule, March 10<sup>th</sup> uprising, defense of Norbulingka, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, forced labor, imprisonment, oppression under Chinese, thamzing, escape experiences.

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**Interview #27D**

**Interviewee: Dolma [alias]**

**Age: 81, Sex: Female**

**Interviewer: Rebecca Novick**

**Interview Date: May 20, 2012**

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:11

**Interviewee #27D: Dolma.**

Q: Where are you from in Tibet?

**#27D: Gonjo in Tibet.**

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, Chinese and the rest of the world.

**#27D: [Nods]**

Q: Your memories are going to help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people.

**#27D: Yes, yes.**

Q: Do you give permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

**#27D: [You] can.**

Q: Thank you very much...

**#27D: [Interrupts] It is the advice of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. If it would be of help, it is good and [I] thank you very much.**

Q: Thank you.

**#27D: [Nods]**

Q: During the interview if you want to take a break, go to the bathroom, anything, just let us know.

**#27D: [Laughs] Okay.**

Q: If there's a question that you would rather not answer, that's fine. You don't have to.

**#27D: Okay.**

Q: If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you if we change your name?

00:02:07

**#27D: It is okay if the name is changed.**

Q: Thank you very much. We really appreciate your coming and sharing your story with us today.

**#27D: [Nods]**

Q: First of all, *ama-la* 'respectful term for mother,' could you tell us a little bit about your family background?

**#27D: My father had passed away when I was very small and [I] did not know him at all. Father had passed away. [My] mother was there. I had a brother. There were no other family members.**

Q: What was your family's livelihood?

**#27D: [We] owned land and animals.**

Q: How did your father die?

**#27D: Yes?**

Q: How did your father die?

00:03:26

**#27D: Father passed away due to sickness.**

Q: You had a farm. What were you farming?

**#27D: [We] mostly grew grains.**

Q: What do you remember about life in your family growing up?

**#27D: [I] worked in the fields and grazed animals. [Nobody] knew any trading and there was no money to be seen. There was never the practice of selling curds or milk. Whatever one wished to consume, it was available. Life was not fast. One spent time cultivating lands and herding animals. One was not aware of other countries nor were there any problems.**

**One made one's clothes. Sheep's wool was woven to make summer wear and pelt for the winter. Separate clothes were made [for the seasons]. Nothing was purchased and there was no practice of buying or selling curds and milk.**

Q: Very self-sufficient. Can you describe your house?

00:05:25

**#27D: In Tibet two or three storied houses were constructed using stones and wood, two or three floors. Animals were tethered on the ground floor; people lived on the middle floor and on the top floor...**

Q: Were there two floors?

**#27D: Three or four-storied [houses] were constructed. Our house had three floors.**

Q: The animals were left on the ground floor?

**#27D: Animals were tethered on the ground floor. If one looked out from the top floor, red, yellow and blue flowers changed the colors of the mountains during summertime. There was great expanse of pastures. It was an extremely happy [place].**

Q: Your house compared to maybe some of the other people's houses in the village, would you say it was one of the better houses or how would you rank your situation?

**#27D: There were some that were better than us and some that were poorer. There were various types.**

Q: Did your mother take another husband?

00:07:11

**#27D: My grandmother's husband had passed away long back.**

Q: Did [she] take a second husband? New husband?

**#27D: Which husband?**

Q: Your father had passed away.

**#27D: Yes.**

Q: After father's demise, did your mother...?

**#27D: It was not the practice to take another husband.**

Q: It wasn't customary?

**#27D: She never took another. It was not the practice. It would be considered bad to take another. Our village was very good. One never sought another [husband]. Everyone told [mother], “[You] must take another, otherwise the family will become poor. There will be problems.” [She] refused and did not seek another.**

Q: Did you go to school at all?

00:08:08

**#27D: Not at all. There were never any schools as such.**

Q: In your region?

**#27D: None. The boys were taught at home. If girls studied, they would be teased if they wished to become nuns. [Laughs] It was a very isolated village.**

Q: Where did you learn to write, *ama-la*?

**#27D: Tibetan writing?**

Q: Yes.

**#27D: I do not know much. [I] learned a bit in the village and then after [I] arrived in India. [I] can just about follow the prayers.**

Q: When you say you learned a bit in your hometown, do you mean you taught yourself or did somebody help you?

**#27D: There was a boy, our relative that was learned and belonged to my father’s family. He used to teach [me] a little. It was very little and not much, just the alphabet. [Laughs]**

Q: When you were a young woman, what was your aspiration for your future?

00:10:15

**#27D: [I] used to think that [I] must go to Lhasa and see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. [I] ran away many times but was caught. Many girls would plot together.**

Q: Oh, tell us about that.

**#27D: [Speaks before question is interpreted] Such a practice was prevalent. Girls would plot to run away to Lhasa and the family members would come to catch and take them back. [Laughs]**

Q: It happened quite often that the women would try and run away to Lhasa? Can you tell me why the women were running away?

**#27D: One could see His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Lhasa and there were many [sacred places] to see. Everybody said that it was a happy place. Seeing the Jowo ‘statue of Buddha**

**Sakyamuni brought to Tibet during the reign of King Songtsen Gampo by his Chinese wife Kongjo' of Lhasa was considered very sacred.**

Q: But the boys weren't trying to run away, only the girls. Why only the girls?

00:11:33

**#27D: Boys did go as well. In our monastery, it was a must for the monks to go to Lhasa. It was imperative for them to go to Tsang Ngorigon in Sakya.**

Q: To become monks?

**#27D: Every monk must go to Sakya. Lhasa was considered sacred in Tibet. [The monks] must go to Ngorigon to receive teachings. Without it [they] were not considered good in the [local] monastery.**

Q: So the monks had an opportunity because they went to Sakya...monastery or to Sakya in Lhasa?

**#27D: Yes, in Lhasa. The Sakya Ngorigon in Lhasa. I belong to the Sakya sect [of Tibetan Buddhism].**

Q: But there weren't many *ani-las* 'respectful term for nuns' coming from your region.

**#27D: There were not many nuns. There were a few. We had a Nyingma Monastery where there were very good nuns. There was a very holy lama who was very famous. He established a very good nunnery.**

Q: When you try to run away to Lhasa, did you do it with some other girls in your neighborhood?

00:13:19

**#27D: Many girls ran away together. There were five or six girls and [I] was not alone.**

Q: Can you tell us what happened, please?

**#27D: [Speaks before interpreter] [I] was caught two or three times.**

Q: What happened when you got caught?

**#27D: [We] would be taken back once caught and scolded, "Why did you go? [You] should not go."**

Q: How far did you get?

**#27D: The furthest was a distance of around two days and the others were half a day and a day. [We] did not get very far.**

Q: Did you ever consider yourself becoming a nun?

**#27D: [I] did not dwell much on the thought of becoming a nun. [I] wished to go to Lhasa. [Laughs]**

Q: Did you ever get to Lhasa actually?

00:14:44

**#27D: Later I came to Lhasa and lived there for a number of years. I was in Lhasa when the attack took place.**

Q: How did you meet your husband?

**#27D: [Speaks before question is interpreted] The best thing in our region was that [we] did not have to pay anything to the doctor for the medicines. The region was that good. Even for a highly accomplished doctor, it was never the custom to take a fee, whether a rich or poor person came for treatment. If you had something to offer, you could, but otherwise it was up to you. [The doctors] did not charge for the medicines.**

Q: Was it Tibetan medicine?

**#27D: Tibetan medicine. The region was that good. Now when [I] look back at it, [I] realize what an incredibly good region it was. That pertained to all doctors.**

Q: How did you meet your husband?

**#27D: When His Holiness the Dalai Lama returned from visiting China, I went to see [His Holiness] in Chamdo. My husband is from Amdo and he was trading in Chamdo. We fell in love and became a couple. [I] must relate it. [It was] during the time His Holiness returned from China. He was a merchant.**

Q: It was a love marriage! Was it difficult to convince your parents because he was from somewhere so far away? Your mother, as your father's passed away.

00:17:24

**#27D: [My family members] did give me problems saying, "Come back. [You] cannot stay [with him]," but I [continued to stay with him]. Relatives came to see [me]. [We] lived in Chamdo doing business. Once father [husband?] and others went to China on trade while I stayed in Chamdo looking after the shop. "The Chinese are not doing good in China. [They] are causing immense suffering. It is not going to be good. It would be better for us to go to Lhasa," said father [husband?].**

Q: Was it his [husband's] father?

**#27D: My husband.**

[Interviewer to interpreter]: She wasn't married yet but she was sort of working...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: She was married.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: She was married at that time. Okay.

00:18:48

**#27D: [Husband] said, “Things are not good now. The Chinese are not doing good. [We] cannot stay.” So six of them from Amdo planned and decided to go to Lhasa. We booked tickets and left for Lhasa.**

Q: Tickets?

**#27D: [We] travelled in vehicles. The Chinese suspected us. The six people were all [my husband’s] friends and relatives and we planned to travel together. The Chinese suspected us and allowed only two people to travel together in one vehicle. So, [we] were two in each vehicle during the journey.**

Q: Were the drivers Chinese?

**#27D: Yes, only Chinese owned vehicles then.**

Q: Did you have any problem understanding him because he spoke Amkay ‘Amdo dialect’ and you spoke Khamkay ‘Kham dialect’? Was there any problem with communication?

**#27D: There were no problems. [Husband] was living with a family friend in Chamdo. He was good in language.**

Q: What kind of man was he?

**#27D: He was good-natured, a very good man. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that such men are scarce. His Holiness has said that he is like a firm mountain. [His Holiness] has really said that.**

Q: Did His Holiness say that?

00:20:46

**#27D: [His Holiness] said that about my husband. He is a very good man, a very reliable man.**

Q: Did you have any problem on your journey to Lhasa?

**#27D: On the way?**

Q: On the way.

**#27D: [We] did not face any problem on the journey. [We] reached safely. Upon reaching there, he had a relative who was living in Lhasa and [we] could stay at his home. At that**

**time the Chinese were being good to everyone as a form of trickery.**

Q: Do you recall what year this was?

**#27D: My [age]?**

Q: Yes.

**#27D: I was 22 or 23 years old then.**

Q: How did you find Lhasa? What was the impression that it made on you after having run away so much to try and get there?

00:22:25

**#27D: [I] felt very happy. I felt very happy to see all the [sacred places] in Lhasa. However, one was not very happy in Lhasa because a war was looming and there was a lot of turmoil in Lhasa. Then my husband and the others decided to join the war and [I] was not very happy.**

Q: While you were in Lhasa, your husband decided to join the volunteer force, is that right?

**#27D: Yes. [He] went once to China from Lhasa to trade. At that time the Chinese had confiscated a lot of money [from him]. Then [he] returned and said that [he] wanted to join the war, join the resistance force that was formed at Diguthang. We made preparation by buying a horse. I gave birth to a son. [I] had a child then.**

Q: Was this the Tensung Dhanglang Army? Is that the name of it that your husband joined?

**#27D: Yes?**

Q: Which army did he join?

**#27D: The *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force]. The *Chushi Gangdrug*'s base camp was at Diguthang to revolt against the Chinese. It was headed by Andrug Jindha [Andrug Gonpo Tashi] and my husband left to join it. My husband and his sibling left to join it. [My] son was a year old then.**

Q: A year old son.

**#27D: Yes. It was a year before the attack in Lhasa that [husband] left. The army camp was at Diguthang.**

Q: Was this before *Chushi Gangdrug* was probably formed and it was called Tibetan Volunteer Force or something?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: This is another stage perhaps she is talking about, before *Chushi Gangdrug* was properly formed.

00:25:15

**#27D: Some had reached there. The army camp was established at Diguthang. People were going there. All people were going there.**

Q: Have you ever heard of this term Tensung Dhanglang? Does that mean anything to you?

**#27D: Yes?**

Q: Have you heard of Tensung Dhanglang Army?

**#27D: Tensung Dhanglang? [I] have not.**

Q: What happened when your husband joined *Chushi Gangdrug*? Where did he go?

**#27D: The army camp was at Diguthang, at Diguthang.**

Q: Digu?

**#27D: Andrug Jindha had established the army camp there at Diguthang.**

Q: Diguthang?

**#27D: Yes.**

Q: How far away was that?

00:26:21

**#27D: [Speaks before question is interpreted] It's the name of the place.**

Q: How far is it from Lhasa?

**#27D: It is at quite a distance from Lhasa. [I] do not know how much. It is towards Lhoka.**

Q: Did you try to persuade him not to go?

**#27D: [I] did. We went to visit lamas. [We] saw His Holiness the Dalai Lama who revealed a dark countenance. He [husband] was determined to go. [I] persuaded [him] not to but he wished to. [We] visited a holy lama who said, "Go and join the war. There will be three battles. I guarantee that nothing will happen to you." "Let him go," said Kangyur Rinpoche to me. Both of us were there and it was decided then. [I] told [him] to go.**

Q: What happened to you? What did you do? Were you on your own at this time or was somebody helping you?

**#27D: There were me, [my] baby and a baby sitter. We were three.**

Q: Was there a baby sitter?

**#27D: Yes. [She] helped with the work and baby-sat. And there were many from my region.**

Q: Were there many people from the same region?

00:28:08

**#27D: Yes, there were. They were living close by.**

Q: Were you able to get news about your husband?

**#27D: [I] heard. They were two brothers that went. [They] went to get weapons from an armory of the Tibetan Government and on the way back, there was an encounter at Tsethang where my husband's brother was killed during artillery firing. [He] was killed by the Chinese before the attack in Lhasa, at Tsethang. Twelve men were killed.**

Q: Were 12 Tibetan men killed?

**#27D: Yes. I heard such [news].**

Q: What happened to you, *ama-la*? What happened back in Lhasa?

**#27D: I lived idly in Lhasa, at times doing a bit of trading. [I] stayed idly. One could not do much because of the turmoil and the imminent attack. Then my husband went to Kongpo, to Nyitri to fight. [He] said that [they] had fought at Nyitri.**

Q: Nyitri?

**#27D: Yes, Nyitri in Kongpo. The attack in Lhasa was yet to happen then. Several encounters took place before the attack in Lhasa.**

Q: What kind of business were you doing?

00:30:14

**#27D: Everybody purchased goods in India and sold them.**

Q: What kinds of goods?

**#27D: There were different kinds of goods, Indian goods. All Tibetan [traders] did that.**

Q: What kinds of goods?

**#27D: There were various kinds of goods. Indian goods were cherished.**

Q: How did your life change in Lhasa?

**#27D: Lhasa was lost a year after [my] husband left. There was an attack. The attack happened a year after they left. In that one year, there was great commotion in Lhasa and it was very scary, with revolts and such. The war was lost in the year '59. It was a year after he had left.**

Q: What happened to you and your son?

**#27D: Cannons were fired in Lhasa at 3 o'clock in the morning. Naturally there was chaos. Cannons were fired around 3 o'clock and the glass panes of the houses vibrated. Gunshots were fired everywhere. We lived in a rented house and there were many families. Everybody crowded together and stayed together due to fear. Then it was...**

Q: Was it 3 o'clock in the morning?

00:32:34

**#27D: Yes, [the Chinese] fired cannons at 3 o'clock. There were cannons and guns fired everywhere.**

Q: This is March 10<sup>th</sup>?

**#27D: When the attack took place?**

Q: Yes.

**#27D: Was it not in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tibetan lunar month?**

Q: And then what happened?

**#27D: [[Speaks before question is interpreted] There was an attack and then Tibet was lost.**

Q: Is there anything else you want to tell us...

**#27D: [Interrupts] Then the Chinese entered our compound and instantly pointed [their] guns at us and asked if there were any rebels. [They] were looking for men that had revolted against them and searched every house. [They] pointed guns at us and searched the homes. Then [they] took away all the men that were present.**

Q: All the men were taken away?

**#27D: Yes.**

00:34:05

**The majority of the people were surrounding the Potala Palace [Norbulingka?], guarding it. They were all killed or arrested. Bodies had to be piled and burned with kerosene oil. [They] killed everyone. Those that were in the homes were searched and the men taken**

**away. [They] did not leave any man. They were jailed, arrested or killed. This is what I witnessed. I was present there.**

Q: Did you see the bodies being burned?

**#27D: [I] did not see that because I did not go to Norbulingka ‘Dalai Lama’s Summer Palace.’ I was living in Lhasa then and knew everything. All the people were guarding Norbulingka believing that His Holiness the Dalai Lama was living there.**

Q: Did the Chinese come to your house also?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: “Yeah, they came to my house and took all the men.”

Q: Um...okay, there were men living in your house? How many men were in your house? What do you mean, your neighborhood? What exactly?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Because they had rent out the premises for people for business. They were all together when this was happening.

Q: Did they also come to where you actually were staying yourself? Did they threaten you or say anything to you about your husband, for example?

**#27D: [The Chinese] searched the home.**

Q: [They] searched the home and did they threaten you about your husband going to join the revolt?

**#27D: [They] remarked that [he] had gone to revolt. In our compound, [the Chinese] separated [the family members of] those that had left [to join the resistance]. They took all of us, [the family members of] those that had joined the revolt.**

Q: Were you also taken away?

**#27D: Yes. [We] were put in a house and questioned, “Where’s your husband? What? How?” Many things occurred and it is not possible to describe everything. [I] swear it is impossible to relate. All the women went to identify their husbands among the corpses. Such was the misery suffered by all. [I] felt fortunate that [my husband] had gone. It was fortunate that [my] husband was not there. There was so much suffering.**

Q: When the women went to look for their husbands’ bodies, where did you go to look?

00:37:33

**#27D: Those of us, [wives of] rebels were taken away separately and interned in another house in Lhasa.**

Q: When the women went to look for the husbands’ bodies, were the bodies piled up somewhere? I know it’s a difficult question but...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, she has already said it's very difficult to describe.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: She said...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: "...all the problems that we have faced."

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yeah.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: We'll ask again.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: No. I actually was asking when the women went to identify their husbands, right? In what situation were the bodies? Were they piled up somewhere in a room or like how was that?

**#27D: I did not see it. Norbulingka. It was around Norbulingka. I and the others were taken elsewhere. [I] heard that it happened that way. I did not see it.**

Q: And then what happened?

**#27D: Yes?**

Q: And then what happened?

**#27D: Yes?**

Q: What happened next?

**#27D: Some were taken away while I was sent back home because of [my] little child. [I] was taken away often and Chinese police entered [my home] often. There is a long story.**

Q: And then what happened?

00:39:41

**#27D: After seven days...**

Q: Seven days?

**#27D: Yes, when we ventured out seven days after the attack, [the streets were] filled with bodies of people and animals that [the Chinese] had killed. There were bodies of women with their hair hanging out. They were all over the Bakor 'Central Square' and everywhere. Bodies were everywhere. [I] heard that at Lhasa Ramoche house, there were so many bodies that people could not enter. I did not see it though.**

Q: And then?

**#27D:** Then they [the Chinese] separated [the people]. Some were jailed, some killed, some sent to China, some given forced labor, and tightened [their] grip such that nobody could move. After that food became scarce. [The Chinese] took away all the food in the homes and ordered that none could buy anywhere but from them. No one was allowed to keep even a *gyama* ‘half a kilogram’ of grain. [They] came to search homes. I stayed for four years after the attack.

Q: Four years?

**#27D:** Yes. [I] was in forced labor for four years. I will just relate briefly and not much.

Q: Anything else you want to tell us?

00:41:51

**#27D:** Then all of us, the family members of the rebels were called and questioned, “Where did [your husband] go? With whom did [he] go? How did [he] go?” [I] was given work and sent to make barrages and canals, with the child on the back. [I] had to attend [work] everyday from morning until evening.

When it rained at night—the Tsangpo river of Lhasa is huge—and the water almost overflowed, all the family members of the rebels were called at night to build a barrage. We were forced to haul stones to [repair] the cracks in the night.

Q: What’s the name of the river?

**#27D:** It is the Tsangpo of Lhasa. The Lhasa Tsangpo is a huge river. Everyone went to work during the day but we [the family members of rebels] had to go separately in the night [too].

During day when we went [to work], it was just black tea to drink and *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley.’ [We] were allotted 15 *gyama* of *tsampa* a month. Having been labeled as rebels it was only 10 *gyama* of grains to prepare *tsampa* and 5 *gyama* of peas, only 15. The non-rebels received a share of 25 [*gyama*]. That was for a month. That was the quantity [the Chinese] sold [to an individual]. That was the only amount one could purchase.

Q: Twenty-five times?

00:43:58

**#27D:** Our share was 15 [*gyama*]. It was 15 for the rebels. One was not allowed to keep more [food] than that at home. [The Chinese] sold the allotment every month. “[You] cannot keep grains and food at home. The rebels have left taking the entire wealth of the Tibetan Government. We must plan anew. Produce more and spend less. We must work more and spend less. Eat less,” [the Chinese said]. [We] did not have *tsampa* to eat, [I] swear. Everyday five, six, 10, 15 people died of starvation. This is a fact. This is not a lie. [People] died for lack of *tsampa*. Meat and butter were out of the question.

[The measurement] was *gyama*, which is half a kilogram.

Q: Half a kilogram?

**#27D: Half a kilogram is one Chinese *gyama*.**

**One was not allowed to keep any grains at home. [The Chinese] frequently came to search homes. If [we] had received small quantities [of grains] from villagers, those must be stashed beneath dung. Policemen came to search. “[You] cannot keep such. We must work hard. Produce more and spend less. One must develop the nation and spend less. If one eats less, there will be a surplus from millions of people and that will benefit [the nation].” That is the truth. [They] were shameless.**

00:46:15

**Numerous died. As for the prisoners, innumerable died from starvation. It was really horrifying. When someone retched, there was a clamor for the vomit. [I] do not have to speak about the prisoners because many others have spoken [about it] and you would know. However, that was how the people suffered. Many people died and there were deaths everyday.**

**Some ate leaves of trees because [they] had nothing to eat. Then developed diarrhea and boils, and the bodies became bloated and died like this [moves side to side].**

**I witnessed [someone] breaking the idol in the temple of our courtyard and in desperation eat the holy grains packed within [the statue]. These are my actual [experiences] and I do not lie. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has advised [us] not to lie. These are what I have actually witnessed.**

00:48:00

**Then [I] underwent forced labor for many years. [I] will relate my suffering. [The Chinese said,] “Ask your husband to come back.” Some of the husbands were returning and [the Chinese] gave them food and the couples [ate] together. “[You] can also be in this situation. Ask your [husband] to come back,” [The Chinese] said and gave us books and advised us much. “I do not know. You please bring him back,” I replied. [I] was forced to say that.**

**Numerous meetings used to be called and a lot of work [assigned], which [I] did with my child on [my] back. I was made to wash wool. [The Chinese] gave me a huge bundle of wool [shows gesture of carrying on back] and [I had to wash it by] beating it with a long stick with [my] child lying beside. [I] was forced to wash wool by beating it with a stick. In this way a year or two went by. And then [I] was told, “You can go home if you want.” [I] was released. I will relate in brief. Anyway, [I] labored a great deal.**

**Later, India and China went to war. There was a war. A meeting of the people of Lhasa was called during that time. Earlier *thamzing* ‘struggle session’ were conducted. It is scary to talk about the *thamzing*; people were beaten so much. During the meeting it was said, “Rumor mongers, those not having faith in the nation and those people who have not been indoctrinated, must be segregated. India and China are at war and they cannot live in the**

city. Everybody must gather day after tomorrow.” Names were written down and my name was one. We were 80 people that were segregated in Lhasa. [We] were told to come the day after the next. Everybody said that [we] would be taken to China and started crying. I thought that perhaps I would be taken [to China] but felt determined.

00:50:11

I have another story that happened earlier. I escaped earlier. I fled carrying [my] child four months after the attack when the first *thamzing* took place. [I] fled through Tsang Nyenmo with some people from Nyenmo. There was another lady with a grown up daughter and I with my little child. We fled towards Tsurpu, the seat of His Holiness the Karmapa. There was a snow covered mountain pass at Tsurpu that [we] crossed. Then [we] arrived in Tsang Nyenmo. [We] failed to cross the river. If one could cross the river, there were various routes to India. One could not reach anywhere without crossing [the river].

So, in order to cross [the river], [we] went to Nyenmo. There was a place called Nyaso Du in Nyenmo, a point where boats ferried. Two people helped us reach there. It was towards evening and there were people in boats. “Please row us. We will give you a lot of money.” [We] carried money but they refused. “We dare not row [you]. The Chinese will arrest [us]. [We] will hand you over to the Chinese.” And then...[to interpreter] Do [you] not have to tell her [interpreter] this story?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: It’s okay.

**#27D:** Then our guide told [them], “Please do not hand [them] over to the Chinese. Just leave [them] alone even if [you] do not want to row [them across].” [We] were left alone and then [we] retraced [our] steps stealthily in the night, [I] carrying [my] child. We hid with a family. After hiding for a day or two, [we] went to a place called Saka Du. People of Tsang would know this while we do not. [We] went to Saka Du and were rowed across immediately. [The boatman] did not even take money. [We] stayed on the other bank and the next day climbed up a mountain pass and came to an estate called Lhalu Shika. And then a great number of Chinese appeared and caught us.

Q: What was the place where [you] were caught?

**#27D:** It was further away from Tsang Nyenmo and called Lhalu Shika.

Q: Lhalu Shika.

**#27D:** Lhalu Shika. It’s in Tsang, Tsang Nyenmo. [We] crossed at Saka Du and went through Bartham and there was Lhalu Shika. It was teeming with Chinese and [we] were caught and taken away.

Q: Were you taken back to Lhasa?

**#27D:** Yes?

Q: Were you taken back to Lhasa?

00:53:11

**#27D: No. [We] were taken to the office. [We] were not carrying anything and were dressed in villagers' clothes. We had given our clothes away and worn villagers' attire and carried a small villagers' sack with *tsampa* and a few things. There was just a little quantity of *tsampa* and some things to eat. [We] could not carry much. They went through these after arresting [us]. [We] were kept there and scolded everyday. There were two questioning [sessions] a day. "You have connections abroad with your husbands. You have fixed appointments to meet at a certain location; otherwise we do not believe that you, a weak person can arrange to do this by yourself. Tell us truthfully." They said this.**

**Then the leader of the region was subjected to *thamzing* and brought there. We were chided and kept there for quite a long time. The lady who was with me had a daughter that was a grown up girl. [They] did not want to escape but I had brought them along. I thought, "The Chinese are going to kill all four of us. I am the cause. [I] must let the mother and daughter flee as [we] are already across the river. I cannot [flee] carrying [my] child." [I] went outside and [the Chinese] did not say anything.**

**Then the lady and daughter left [after I told them], "You should go. I am giving up my life as well as my child's if you can be saved." [We] had heard that once across the river, one could flee to Sikkim, Bhutan and other places. They left and early the next morning I reported that my colleagues were missing. I lied. [The Chinese] asked, "Where did [they] go?" "[I] do not know. Last night [they] were sleeping but this morning [they] are not here." [The Chinese] were angry and kicked [me] saying, "Tell us." "[I] do not know." "It does not matter if [you] do not know. We will bring them here at once." Riding horses, [they] left.**

00:55:38

**I was terrified that [the mother and daughter] would be brought back but [they] were not. They told me secretly that they had not gone to look [for them]. [The Chinese] had sent Tibetans to look for them and they had not. [Laughs] [The Tibetans] told me secretly that [they] had not searched. [The Chinese] said, "We have her [the mother] with us and she speaks the truth. You are lying. She is with [us]." I knew she was not with them. Now there were just me and [my] son.**

**The leader of the region was subjected to *thamzing*. He and I were led away. His hands were tied [gestures putting hands behind back] and we were each on a horse. There were three men with guns in front and three at the back. [We] had to go far away across the river. [We] were being led. There was an estate of the Namseling where [I] was taken. I do not know where the leader was taken.**

**There were prisoners within the compound. The prisoners were people of Tsang. My son and I were put in a small room. It was the estate of Namseling in Nyenmo, in Tsang Nyenmo. [We] were kept there and given *tingmo* 'steamed bread' to eat. [We] were there for around 10 months. Sometimes the Chinese took away [my] child. Sometimes they took [him] away and when questioned, he replied, "My father has gone to shoot guns." [The Chinese] used to laugh. [Laughs]. [He] was very small. They gave things to eat to the child.**

00:57:26

**On the top floor [of Namseling estate] lived Chinese soldiers in khaki and on the lower floor those Chinese in blue. Reformation had not yet been implemented then. [They] carted away the things from Namseling [estate]. One night as I slept, they [the Chinese] said, “*Thupi*.” *Thupi* meant the *Chushi Gangdrug*. There were around 80 horses tethered. They [the Chinese] had retained all the best horses of the region. They rode the horses out in the night. [They] shone flashlights at me, but I was too scared and opened my eyes just a slit. [I] was scared even when [I] slept. Then all of them left and returned in the morning and said that there were no *thupi*.**

**So, I was there for around 10 months. Then they said, “You are sentenced to six years of hard labor for your crime. You are a rebel and so is your husband. You are frail and with a child, yet you revolt against the nation. You must perform hard labor for six years.” Much later they said, “Taking pity on the child, [we] will send you to Lhasa now. If you confess your crime, you will receive leniency. If not, your sentence is six years.” Then [I] was sent to Lhasa. [I] was sent to Lhasa Taring, which is the biggest prison in Lhasa.**

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The four years that she was talking about, this was a prison, right? The four years that she was talking about where she was doing the hard labor—that whole situation, did you understand?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It was not prison. They were assigned duties.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: But she was guarded. Obviously there was no freedom to come and go and do what she wanted. She couldn't escape.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In the afternoon they had to work. They went back to the home.

Q: What happened after you were in Taring?

**#27D: Taring was a prison.**

Q: A prison. What happened there?

01:04:45

**#27D: [I] was sent to Taring. I was not escorted by soldiers but by civilians. I entered Taring and showed the document that I had been given.**

Q: If not soldiers, who did you go with?

**#27D: I was sent with a *tsukdang* ‘leader appointed by Chinese’ of the region. During the journey they were sympathetic and said, “This mother and child will die.” They spent two extra days on the journey. “[She] is to be imprisoned in Taring.” They were good to me. In the morning [I] went to Taring and gave the letter. [Prison official] looked at the letter and left [me] beside a tree in the center of the courtyard.**

[He] called up the office of the leader and said [to me], “You will be handed over to the people. You can go home.” [I] replied, “I do not want to return.” [I] thought they were not aware that I had fled and that [they] would take me [home] and then bring me back, which would embarrass me in front of the neighbors. So, it was better to remain in jail now. “I do not want to go. I will stay here,” I said.

Then they took [me] and called up the office of the leader who said that I was to be given a house. I went and saw that my house was sealed. [I] was given an empty ground floor room and told to live in it. In the night the neighbors brought utensils and foodstuff. [I] lived there like that.

01:06:47

[I] was ordered to attend a meeting of the people and told, “Tell everything that you have done. You must accept your crime. You must admit to all your crimes in front of the people.” So I spoke about the difficulties of trying to escape. [I] was forced to say so, as I was scared. It was necessary to flatter them [the Chinese]. [Laughs] “Do not try to escape. It is not good. There are problems. It is futile,” I said a lot along that line. “Presently, thanks to the Communist Party, [I] was not put me in prison and [they] are so good.” [Laughs] I was forced to say so, standing up in the meeting.

[I] was given work everyday. There were activists assigned to keep watch over me. They were to observe, “Who comes to her house? In whose house does she go?” The police entered [homes] frequently at night. Later my son fell ill and passed away. [He] was not well.

Q: Were prisoners told to watch over you?

#27D: [They] were not prisoners. [They] were *hurtsonpa* ‘activists,’ those [Tibetans] that liked the Chinese and worked actively. They were called *hurtsonpa* and watched over the people. [They] had been instructed to watch me because they [the Chinese] did not trust me.

01:08:19

“You have been to Lhoka and everywhere. Confess well with whom you have interactions. If not, there are two ways open for you. It is your wish where you want to go. If you are good, there is one way and if not, there is another. There are only two options,” the Chinese said. I did a lot of work. And then India and China declared war. When India and China were at war, 80 of us were segregated. I was segregated then. We were taken away. The 80 people were put in vehicles and taken away. Everyone wept and wailed saying that they were being taken to China. Then we left. I did not have [my] child because [he] had passed away by then.

We journeyed towards Tsurpu and then to a distant place. [We] were left at an uninhabited region [saying], “You must build drivable roads.” Areas had been demarcated for each group. “Construct drivable roads,” [we] were told and left there. On Sunday [we] went to a village in search of *tsampa*. “Please do not come. It has been announced in the

**village that you are people that have not been educated and no one is to have any interactions with anyone [of you].” [The villagers] would not let us come.**

Q: Where was she taken?

**#27D: Yes?**

Q: You said there was an open region where you were to build drivable roads. What’s the name of the place?

01:12:36

**#27D: The name was Yangpachen.**

Q: Yangpachen?

**#27D: Yangpachen. It is in the north on the way to Nagchu.**

Q: Nagchung?

**#27D: On the way to Nagchukha.**

Q: They were constructing roads.

**#27D: [Speaks question is interpreted] Ten people received a tent each. Eighty people were given eight tents.**

Q: The roads were being constructed from where to where? Do you know?

**#27D: There were roads that [we] were to repair.**

Q: Repair roads?

**#27D: Yes. At that time a great number of tanks was plying to India to fight. We were happy [claps] hoping for a fierce war. When a tank passed, [we] watched and prayed that there should be a war, hoping that [?] win.**

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Coming from Amdo side?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Towards the India border.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: From Nagchu is very far from the Indian border.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, towards India.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Right, I know but Nagchupa is actually very northeast.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: But they were going towards the Indian border to fight.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: No, I understand that, but the trucks were coming from Amdo, yeah? From Amdo direction.

Q: Were [they] coming from Amdo?

**#27D: Yes, [they] were coming from China.**

Q: Yeah, through Amdo.

**#27D: [Speaks question is interpreted] And going to India to fight.**

Q: And across the Changthang ‘Northern Plateau’?

**#27D: Yes?**

Q: Was it near Changthang? Changthang?

**#27D: It was not near Changthang. The Changthang road?**

Q: The Changthang road.

**#27D: Changthang is in Lhasa and that was not in Lhasa. It was far away.**

**I was the cook then. The steward of the Gaden Jangtse Chogyal Rinpoche was there and the Rinpoche had advised the others to help me. So I was [assigned the job of] the cook, which was a simpler task. There was nothing to cook except making black tea. There was nothing to eat except *tsampa*, which was in short supply.**

01:15:20

**That was how it was and finally, I worked...Then they [the Chinese] gave a little relaxation. When I was in the prison in Nyenmo [I] had a dream. There were three rainbows and His Holiness the Dalai Lama emerged from the center and blessed me like this [holds out right hand palm facing down] and the next day I was released. [I] forgot to mention this earlier.**

Q: Was that a Chinese leader? [Interpreter misunderstands *ja* ‘rainbow’ and *gya* ‘Chinese’]

**#27D: That was when I was jailed in Nyenmo. [I] had such a dream. I was released soon after [I] had the dream.**

Q: In the dream?

**#27D: Yes, in the dream. There were three rainbows and His Holiness the Dalai Lama emerged in one and placed his hand like this [holds out right hand palm facing down] and prayed. The next day [I] was told, “You will be sent to Lhasa.”**

Q: Was it a dream?

**#27D: It was a dream.**

Q: And what happened then?

01:16:52

**#27D: Then [we] were told, “The work is complete. You can go back.” We were released from the road construction [site] and returned to Lhasa. Then a huge meeting was held to mourn one or two Chinese leaders that had been killed by the Indians. The Chinese held a huge meeting. We were very happy to hear that Chinese leaders had been killed.**

Q: You had to hide your happiness.

**#27D: [Speaks question is interpreted] I cannot go much into details, so that is about it. I always had the thought of escaping. I found that there was a way through Kongpo Nyitri, another through Thoe and a third through Phari. I sought a divination and the best route was Phari. I prepared to flee. The Chinese said to me, “You are young. You must get married to a good man and the nation [government] will help you.”**

Q: Were [you] asked to marry a Chinese?

**#27D: [I] do not know. “Marry a good man and [the government] will help you. If you do not wish to marry, you are thinking negatively. [Your] thoughts are not good. You do not wish to tread the good path.” [They] scolded [me] a lot. Then [they] said, “You must go to construct the electricity plant day after tomorrow.”**

Q: Electricity plant?

01:18:53

**#27D: Yes, the one called Ngachenkhang. There was a *tsukdang*, a nun, and I played up to her, “Please excuse me for a few days. I have a lot of pain here [indicates right hip area] from constructing roads earlier.” The nun assented and gave me a few days time. I fled that day. [I] joined traders from Phari by paying them a lot of money. Once again [I] fled from Lhasa. [I] went to Phari and escaped through Bhutan.**

**[We] faced great problems between Phari and Bhutan while negotiating snow-covered mountains. [We] lost [our] way in the snow and it started to snow; there was an avalanche and [I] became disoriented. When [I] shook my head, ice that had formed on the head made a sound. [I] was very thirsty. I did not know the way to Bhutan.**

**Towards next evening, there was a man standing far away doing something like this [waves right hand]. “That looks like a Chinese. If he is a Chinese, let us kill him,” [we] discussed. There was only one man. It was late and if [we] did not make it that night, we were two nights in the snow. The man that was waving disappeared down the pass.**

**Then we climbed down the snowy mountain and followed the man. And that was Bhutanese territory. [We] went there and asked if someone had come but none had arrived. “No one has come.” Actually no one would come there because we had not taken the regular route; [we] did not dare. The people of Phari would know; [we] went through Shingluphu. The regular [route] was Timorla. We went through Shingluphu.**

Q: Was the man not there?

01:21:02

**#27D: Not a soul would come there because there was no route. There were nomads on the other side of the pass and they said, “Nobody came.” A man really did this [waves hand]. Had [we] not made it then, we would have been two nights in the snow. [I] was thirsty and ate snow but it was bitter. [We] met the nomads but they were not hospitable saying that soldiers had told them to hand over [Tibetan escapees] to the Chinese.**

**It was nearing dark and [we] quickly went down to the base of the pass, and came across a family and requested for a room. “Of course. Come in,” [they] said. [We] were given a room and food. “Tomorrow morning [you] should say that you had just arrived then because nomads are not allowed to give shelter these days. [We] are to hand [you] over to the army immediately.” They treated us very well. And then [we] reached Bhutan.**

Q: Bhutan?

**#27D: Bhutan, the country of Bhutan. [We] had spent a night with a family of an old man. In the morning when the old man and we went down, soldiers were climbing up. The soldiers frisked us and took [us] to the army camp. [They] told us that [we] could not go further. Later, after some consultations we were allowed to go. And then [we] went to Bhutan.**

**There was a Representative of the Tibetan Government in Bhutan who knew my husband. [My husband] had earlier worked in Tibetan offices in Missamari [Assam] and various other places in India. [The Representative] said that he knew [my husband] from the *Chushi Gangdrug* and was very good to me. [He] immediately tracked [my husband] who was living in Darjeeling [West Bengal]. We were three people that had to spend a year in Bhutan for some paperwork.**

**Then [I] came to Darjeeling from Bhutan. [My husband and I] lived a few years in Darjeeling, maybe two or three years. [I] came to Darjeeling and we stayed a few years. Then my husband was asked to come to Dharamsala by the *Chushi Gangdrug*. And we came to Dharamsala.**

Q: Wait a second. When did you reunite with your husband?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: We seemed to have skipped about that part.

Q: When did you meet your husband?

01:26:55

**#27D: [I] told [you] that [we] met in Chamdo.**

Q: Met in Chamdo?

**#27D: Yes, and then came to Lhasa.**

Q: No.

**#27D: Oh, in Darjeeling.**

Q: Did you know that he was there...

**#27D: [Interrupts] When I came to Darjeeling, there were around 10 leaders of the *Chushi Gangdrug* that were living together.**

Q: Did you know that he was there?

**#27D: [I] did not. Whether [he] was there or not, I did not want to live under the Chinese. [I] felt it was enough for [me] if [I] could escape to where His Holiness the Dalai Lama lived and it was good if [my husband] was here and if not, there was nothing to be done. I have vowed never to live under the Chinese. I escaped twice and if caught again, there was only death and I prayed to Palden Lhamo [a protective deity] “Today I am going to flee again. If I do not succeed this time, it is my second attempt and they [the Chinese] will kill me. Please take care [of me].”**

Q: Can you describe what your reunion with your husband was like?

01:28:27

**#27D: It was good due to the grace of God. [He] was fine. I felt it was thanks to His Holiness the Dalai Lama.**

**Andrug Jindha passed away then and the three provinces [of Tibet] each deputed a person to make prayer offerings. [My] husband represented Amdo and I could go with them to Dharamsala and all the sacred sites. Everybody was amazed and remarked, “You are so fortunate!” [My] husband was the leader of Amdo. His Holiness the Dalai Lama was living there [points up] in Dharamsala. It was a decrepit residence then.**

Q: Had your husband suffered any injuries during his fighting?

**#27D: Other than an injury here [touches upper lip] suffered from shell fragments, there was not any other injury.**

Q: How did that injury happen?

**#27D: From fragments of artillery shells. [He] said there was a lot of bleeding but nothing serious. Everybody held him but there was no serious injury.**

Q: Is he still alive?

01:30:20

**#27D: Yes, [he] is. [He] is still here. [He] is 80 years old. [He] is healthy.**

Q: Wonderful. That's wonderful.

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: Well, you've had an amazing life and I think it is time for you to take it easy now.

01:30:38

**#27D: Yes.**

Q: Thank you so much. It was really fascinating to listen to you and I also know it was difficult sometimes. Did you tell your husband everything that happened to you?

**#27D: [I] told [him].**

Q: I just want to say I know it was difficult to...

**#27D: [Interrupts] He had also suffered a lot. During the escape journey, the horses and mules fell off [the cliff] at Mon Tawang and they [*Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas] carried *tsampa* on their back and then they ran out of *tsampa* and suffered greatly.**

Q: But the Rinpoche was right.

**#27D: Yes. Around 15 days after His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left, the Chinese announced that they had captured His Holiness. [We] thought it was true and everybody started crying. They had lied.**

**I had a dream—I am talking about things that need not be said. There was a large lake surrounded by mountains. In the center of the lake was His Holiness the Dalai Lama sitting on a throne. Then [I] heard that His Holiness was living [in India].**

Q: Really? Really?

01:32:32

**#27D: [I] really had the dream. I never tell lies, which is the advice of His Holiness. It is useless to tell [lies]. There is no benefit in telling lies. It was like that.**

Q: *Ama-la*, I just need to ask you one more time. We're going to change your name but is it okay to...if this interview was shown anywhere in the world, would it be a problem?

**#27D: It should be okay, though I cannot say for sure.**

Q: And *ama-la*, I just want to ask you, what do you think of the self-immolations happening these days in Tibet?

**#27D: That is out of sheer desperation; [they] have no other choice. Long ago when we were there, many people committed suicide. When it was heard that someone had died that day, it was exclaimed, “How fortunate!” [I] swear such was the suffering.**

Q: Did many people commit suicide?

**#27D: Many died. I am telling you. When it was announced that [he/she] was to be subjected to *thamzing* the next day, many died that night. There was a nun who was ordered to criticize the Trijang Rinpoche. The nun was informed that they would subject her to *thamzing* the next day. The next day...she had lit a butter lamp and hung herself with her knees on the floor. We saw [it] with our eyes. There were many such instances of death.**

01:34:08

**There were others who were informed about being subjected to *thamzing* the next day and were found dead in the morning. Everybody felt happy and remarked, “How fortunate!” When someone is dead and it’s exclaimed as being fortunate, if this is not desperation, then what is?**

**It is the same thing [self-immolation] and they cannot help it. [They] are so desperate as to be helpless. Thinking of it, I feel very sad because I have experienced it. [I] know what the Chinese are like. There were cases of leaping into waters. In those days one did not hear much about what was happening around. Innumerable [people] have committed suicide. I saw [it] with my eyes. [She] was a nun.**

Q: Okay. Thank you so much. Thank you.

**#27D: Thank you.**

END OF INTERVIEW